AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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Title: The Heart of Leadership: An Autoethnographic Study of Issues That Impact Educational
Leadership.

Abstract approved:

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Karen M. Higgins

This autoethnography explores issues that impact educational leadership by examining

individual reflections, perceptions, and responses developed through the lens of a principal of

two elementary schools. The main data source involves journal entries collected over a period of

one year. Theories of educational leadership styles and effective school practices form the basis

of the research analysis. In addition, the research explores the management and organization of

schools to include the following: dealing with unprecedented crises; balancing the human

dimensions of staff, students, parents, and community; and monitoring student progress and

learning.

This autoethnographical journey culminates with the discovery of care, relationships, and

sustainability being the critical attributes in creating a positive impact in educational leadership.

The knowledge acquired through this research has impacted the author in how she fulfills her role

as leader. It is hoped that this research will also guide the reader in self-reflection and inquiry into

what matters most in the field of educational leadership.

The Heart of Leadership: An Autoethnographic Study of Issues That Impact Educational
Leadership

by
Erin K. Prince

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APPROVED:

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Dean of the College of Education

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the
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of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Erin K. Prince, Author

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My journey could never have been completed without the support of many.

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Finally, to Rick, Morgan, Jordan, and Kendall I dedicate this work to you, my family. You are the four who cheered me on, hung in there with me during the roughest times and prayed for my completion so we could return to a normal life. You are the meaning and purpose for all I do and I credit you for surviving this process with such optimism.

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Introduction

I have a story to share that empowered me professionally and personally. My purpose in writing this dissertation is to help find meaning in leadership through the issues experienced in education in order to be more effective and to help others better understand the issues facing educational administrators. Although this research is conducted through the lens of an elementary administrator, I believe my story has the potential to impact and inform leaders throughout all walks of life, as the points I raise certainly transfer to all leadership roles.

My research methodology may seem unorthodox to some, yet it is the power in my voice and the reflection on the experiences I share that is truly important to me in a leadership role. In my dissertation, I will support how autoethnography is a valid and appropriate research methodology to share my study.

Autoethnography is a genre of writing and research that connects the author personally within the culture being researched. Generally these texts are written in first person, featuring dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).
This chapter includes information about me as the author; the purpose of my study; the research methodology; and ideals and beliefs that have impacted me, including feminism and constructivism. It is an introduction to the journey ahead.

Remembrance

Today had been a hectic day with many meetings, student guidance issues, and an inordinate number of phone calls and e-mails to return. As the staff left for the day, I settled in alone for some quiet time, to face my list of tasks to complete.

Opening my computer, I scrolled down the list of new messages. I counted at least twenty. One in particular caught my eye. Evelyn Tull it read. A smile crept across my lips, feeling warmth of friendship and care in my heart. It had been almost a year since I left Forest Hills and Oak Hills for a new position, and Evelyn, my secretary, still periodically kept in touch.

There wasn't much written in the e-mail except the words, "I promised we would remember!" However, there was an attachment that I opened. Suddenly, before my eyes, filling the entire computer screen was a picture. The picture was taken just that week of the front of Forest Hills Elementary School. I saw the familiar classroom windows, the neatly trimmed bushes and the gravel parking lot. What brought tears to my eyes, though, was the brilliance of red. Clear across the entire front of the school were rows and rows and rows of beautiful red tulips. Under my breath I whispered, "Thank you!"

About the Author

My whole life has been focused on education. As early as I can remember, I've had books available and caring parents to share in the joy of learning. I graduated high school not sure of the direction I desired and ended up in the world of education.

I immediately began teaching at the elementary level and taught for thirteen years grades kindergarten through fourth. Believing that a doctoral degree would open the doors to teach at the college level, I pursued a doctoral program. After many conversations with the directors of a variety of programs, I decided to earn a masters in administration as the foundational degree prior to a doctorate.

Once enrolled in administrative classes, I was drawn to leadership in an altruistic way, feeling I could make a more global difference with a whole school or district beyond the classroom. After receiving my master's degree, I became a curriculum, instruction, and assessment specialist for a district with 8,000 students. I worked with kindergarten through twelfth grade students, staff and parents. My responsibilities were many and rewarding, yet I missed the energy of the school environment. It was during this time I began my doctoral program in education.

When given the opportunity, I accepted a principal position for two small, rural grade schools. This is where my journey takes place. Forest Hills is a kindergarten through second grade primary school and two miles up the road Oak Hills holds grades third through fifth. I welcomed the challenge to act as building administrator for these two schools and the staff and community embraced me quickly. The use of autoethnography as a research vehicle to tell my story allowed my learning to evolve through reflection and analysis and provided a powerful tool to help impact other administrators in the field of education.

Purpose of Autoethnographical Research

Senge et al. (2000) stresses the importance of self-awareness on the effectiveness of a leader. In order to better understand the learning organization they are functioning within, administrators need to understand the impact they are having on people and the system and how that impact has changed over time. Realizing that my life was embedded within my field experience as an elementary school principal, I chose to use an autoethnographic approach for my dissertation. At the beginning of my journey, I questioned: *What are the issues that impact educational leaders in our schools today?* I believed I could impact my own learning and the experiences of other administrators through a study of my own educational experience.

Ethnography is described as both a process and a product. All interactions within the researcher's field experience involve moral choices. "Experience is meaningful, and human behavior is generated from and informed by this meaningfulness" (Tedlock, 2000, p.455). Experiencing firsthand interaction with people during everyday functions, ethnographers can realize a richer understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of others (p.470). Enriching the study of others, the self-reflective actions taken by a researcher through autoethnography add a dimension of physical feelings, thoughts, emotions, and depth of meaning to the study.

Autoethnography provides an avenue for studying and writing something meaningful for you and for the world. According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), it "is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of

consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p.739). As this new genre of writing and research has evolved, many other terms have been used in relationship to autoethnography. Some of those terms are reflexive narrative, self-stories, auto-observer, opportunistic research, literary tales, lived experience, and personal narrative (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

Viewing themselves as the phenomenon, researchers write personal narratives focusing on their personal and professional lives. The purpose of the personal narrative is to understand self or some aspect of a life lived in a cultural context. In my case, a personal narrative text would author my own life in my own voice within my school environment. Readers take an active role in this style of writing as they are invited into the author's world; oftentimes taken to a feeling level about the events being described. Ideally, the readers will learn and reflect on the meaning this writing has for their own life. The goal for the researcher is to write purposefully about topics that are important and may make a difference (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

There are political and interpersonal issues that must be addressed when considering using an autoethnographic method. Any time a practitioner writes about themselves, invariably they will be involving other people, including staff members, students, community members, and other administrators. The consequences for writing about experiences within my own environment could be immediate and lasting (Barth, 1990). It will be a difficult balance providing meaningful information without betraying the trust of those included in the writing. My options include fictionalizing details that will camouflage the actual events without destroying the meaning I want to

convey, change names of all subjects referred to in my writing assuring anonymity,

and tell the truth in my report of my narrative reflections.

Another political issue that must be addressed is the fact that autoethnography

is not in line with most of the mainstream, more traditional research methodologies.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) wrote of the many differences in style between the

nontraditional autoethnography, specifically evocative narratives, with traditional

research. Usually authors of narratives write in first person as opposed to separating

the researcher from the subject. Autoethnographic studies often focus on a single study

as opposed to generalizations made from subject to subject. Also, the readability of the

narrative text encourages the reader to co-participate in dialogue as opposed to being a

passive receiver of knowledge. The narrative story portrays the ebb and flow of

relationships stressing the connected lives as opposed to the standard practice of

portraying social life and relationships as a snapshot.

> Of course in this method of study, the bias of the author is inevitable and some researchers feel the personal narrative reflects or advances a "romantic construction of the self" (Atkinson, as cited in Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.745). The author must keep in mind that in honest autoethnographic exploration, many fears, doubts, and emotional pain can emerge. It can be a vulnerable experience revealing yourself and not being able to take back what was written, or even more challenging, not having control over how readers interpret your writing. Qualitative researchers record their feelings as a method of controlling bias. The use of feelings to generate understanding is the goal of autoethnography and should prove to have a positive impact on the research. Feelings are not to be repressed, rather to be used as an important aid in expressing meaning. (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p.91)

The purpose of this autoethnographical study is to identify and discuss issues

that impact educational leadership in an elementary school setting. My study grows

out of passion to be an effective leader. I will examine my leadership role from day-to-day thoughts, feelings, negotiations, and problem solving situations and then explore the issues faced. How my leadership role is defined and impacted by these issues will be my focus and how it may redefine me as a leader in the end.

> Who we are, to whom we are related, how we are situated
> all matter in what we learn, what we value,
> and how we approach intellectual and moral life. (Noddings, 1992, p.xiii)

Influence of Beliefs

The interpretations of our thoughts, biases, assumptions, beliefs, and understandings of knowledge acquired throughout our lifetime and how we receive this knowledge can be described as a personal epistemology. Described as "the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated" (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996, p.16), an epistemology is a journey unique to an individual's life experiences and influenced by many factors. As a continuous process, theoretical perspectives are forming, changing, and transforming as various influences directly and indirectly touch our lives. In search of my own personal epistemology, I have discovered many influences and experiences throughout my life journey that have formed and transformed my way of knowing. Some of the perspectives that relate directly to who I am and who I am becoming have roots in the theoretical arena of feminism as described in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1997).

Women's ways of knowing.

I realize that the area of feminism is quite broad and encompasses many perspectives that could lead to discussions of the comparisons of leadership characteristics between genders. I am choosing instead to focus my epistemological discussion to include the areas of feminism that have the most meaning to me personally and professionally.

Historically, women have not been profiled as leaders, although there are many leadership roles served by women throughout history. Many studies have been examined on leadership quality comparisons between men and women. Weedon's study in 1987(as cited in Curry, 2000) argued "the essential biological nature of women guarantees the inevitability that we should fulfill particular economic and social functions which may not be in our own interest"(p.15). Helgesen's study (cited in Curry, 2000) argues that women have an advantage in leadership roles due to socialization. She goes on to compare leadership qualities between men and women, focusing on women's socialization skills, due in part to a need for survival, as an advantage in engaging others.

The feminist epistemology that impacts me the most is the research focused on the "inner voice" that emerges with the identity of self during the maturation process life provides us. During the process of learning about who we are and in what we believe, the theory of acquiring knowledge reflects on how our "self" connects with others and the world around us. The knowledge gained and how we interpret the world around us based on this knowledge is acquired through an evolutionary process

described by Belenky et al., in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1997). They found "that women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined" (p.18).

Women's Ways of Knowing (1997) explains how all the theories in our heads are constructed, including our actions, others' perceptions of us, and our perceptions of how others perceive us; thereby forming the way we think. Connecting to the ideas of constructivism, feminism focuses on how we think and learn through experiences with relationships, life's demands, dealing with crises, and communications with others.

The theoretical framework of *Women's Ways of Knowing* is explored through the areas of *silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge,* and *constructed knowledge*. The four authors created a study that was written as a collective voice capturing the various stages of how the women studied perceived themselves based on their life and educational experiences (Belenky et al., 1997).

The continuum, based on the work of William Perry (as cited in Belenky et al., 1997), begins with *silence* where individuals gather knowledge through concrete experiences, not words. There is very little awareness of the power of language for sharing thoughts and insights. Typical for the silent women is the inability to find meaning in the words of others. There is a feeling of passivity and dependency on authoritative figures. Very few silent women can trust their ability to understand and remember what was said and tend to look to authority for guidance. In describing

themselves, silent women tend to see the world from their vantage point only; providing the perspective seen from their own eyes gazing outward on the world. One woman was struggling with the task of describing herself and answered, "I don't know…No one has told me yet what they thought of me" (1997, pp.31-32).

The second level of the ways of knowing is described as *received knowledge*, or listening to the voices of others. Individuals relying on received knowledge think of words as central to the knowing process. Being a good listener, soaking up information, and seldom speaking up or giving an opinion are characteristics of this level of understanding. What is heard from others is perceived as concrete. The assumption is that there is only one right answer to any question and anything to the contrary is automatically wrong (Belenky et al., 1997).

Received knowers tend to subordinate their own actions and will devote themselves to the care of others while remaining selfless. This selflessness is a theme that emerged in studies of moral development central to women's voices. Women tend to define themselves as they relate in human relationships, as well as judging their capability to care for others (Gilligan, 1982).

Subjectivism is a redefinition of authority for many. This is a stage where the orientation to authority shifts from external to internal. The absolute truth experienced by those in silence or received knowledge levels held true for everyone, not so in subjective knowledge. The absolute truth is only for the individual. Truth becomes an intuitive reaction; something experienced and not thought out. Subjective knowers do

not view themselves as part of the process or constructors of truth. Truth emerges through them (Belenky et al., 1997).

This is where Gilligan believes that this transitional shift into subjectivity signifies the transition into mature moral thought. This is a late-developmental shift in which the self becomes more of an equal part in moral decision-making (Gilligan et al., 1988). However, subjectivist women were observed as moving in the direction of gaining knowledge for themselves through their inner perceptions, but lacked a coherent, reflective moral maturity (Belenky et al., 1997).

> Practical knowledge also gives meaning and importance to theoretical knowledge and can provide the working base needed to extend and generalize one's knowledge. (Noddings, 1992, p. 149)

Procedural knowledge, also known as the voice of reason, is the next level of understanding. This is an inner voice that speaks in a more humble, yet powerful manner. At this level, the realization is made that truth cannot just be "known" and that some things are not always what they seem. Truth may lie hidden beneath the surface and will take careful observation and analysis to receive knowledge. Women that are functioning within the procedural level of knowing tend to think before they speak. Feeling that "their ideas must measure up to certain objective standards, they speak in measured tones. Often, they do not speak at all. But this is not a passive silence; on the other side of this silence, reason is stirring"(Belenky et al., 1997, p.94).

Procedural knowing is a more complex, objective look at understanding than subjective knowing. Women at the subjective level tend to be open to new ideas in essence, but only listen to their inner voice and ignore the ideas and opinions of others.

Procedural knowing is more of an objective process. There is a planned and deliberate fashion used in problem solving and in taking control of their lives. These knowers are practical and systematic in looking at the world around them.

Within the procedural level, there are two types of understanding. One is known as separate knowing, the other is connected knowing. Women functioning at a separate knowing level of understanding learn how to look at the world through a different lens than just through their eyes. However, they perceive knowledge on a separate level, but exclude any other person's perspective. Only the facts and empirical evidence is taken into consideration when forming knowledge.

Unlike separate knowledge, connected knowledge shifts the focus from self to other people's ways of thinking. It is the introduction of empathy that makes this level of understanding unique. Separate knowers look through the lens of discipline, while connected knowers learn to look through the lens of another person (Belenky et al., 1997). Connected knowing involves emotions and is rooted in relationships. As Noddings (1992) discussed, the act of caring involves relationships, but she also reminded us that all people have different capacities from which to be able to care for others or attend to objects and ideas.

Connected knowing is an attempt to integrate knowledge that has been felt intuitively and personally with the knowledge learned from others. It is the "weaving together the strands of rational and emotive thought and of integrating objective and subjective knowing" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 134).

Understanding the different levels of knowing and how perceptions can be formed based on how an individual responds to a situation will be helpful in my study. I will return to Belenky et al.'s (1997) discussion as a framework to reflect and make sense of my research. By examining my personal narratives using these different levels of knowing, I hope to better understand my leadership style and also gain insights into those around me.

Constructivism.

Constructivism involves a person's consideration of his or her identity. Coming out of the theory of objectivism where knowledge of the world comes from an individual's experience of it, constructivism contrasts this view. The constructivist theory assumes that individuals construct knowledge as they attempt to make sense of their experiences. "Learners, therefore, are not empty vessels waiting to be filled, but rather active organisms seeking meaning" (Driscoll, 1994, p. 360).

Constructed knowing includes a high tolerance for internal contradiction and ambiguity. Stress and conflict are accepted, rather than avoided, during the knowing process. Self-examination leads the constructed knower into a way of thinking about knowledge, truth, and self that guides the person's intellectual and moral life and personal commitments (Belenky et al., 1997).

For constructivists, the theme of caring for, and attending to, another person and to relate with that person is extremely important. Their passion for integrating feeling and care into their work and the desire to improve the quality of life for others becomes a quest. Reflection about attitudes and judgments and how they integrate

with their own moral convictions are vital to the constructivist. More than any other level of knowing, the constructed knower acts out of a feeling of responsibility to the larger community in which they live (Belenky et al., 1997).

Upon entering Janet's second grade classroom, I noticed she was in the middle of a mathematics lesson. Students were sitting at their desks with paper, pencil and a pile of beans. Janet stood in front of the class using the overhead as a tool. "….but tell us how you got that answer James?" Janet asked. James replied that he had added the two beans to five and that made seven beans. "That's great. Does anyone have another way to get the number seven?" Many hands shot up. Isaac responded with subtracting three beans from ten to make seven. Janet had the students manipulate the beans as Isaac did to show his reasoning.

The lesson went on in this manner with students creating a different response to the number seven other than the teacher-given equation of 3+4=7. Learning was evolving through discovery. Students were being given the opportunity to construct meaning around the concept of seven in many different ways. Janet's way of teaching demonstrates the constructivist view that students can construct their own mental representations of conceptual structures.

Constructivism is not one theory, but a multitude of approaches rooted in the philosophical and psychological viewpoints from such famous works of Piaget, Bruner, and Goodman. Piaget believed that knowledge was not a "static body of information," rather more of a process where the learner takes responsibility for constructing and reorganizing knowledge (as cited in Lambert et al., 1995, p.20). The

concept that learning is enhanced by the ability to create meaning from experience

opened the door for new instructional leadership to take place in schools. With the

changing way that knowledge was viewed through constructivism, students in the

classroom, along with teachers and administrators became more active in the process

of constructing knowledge together.

> Learners do not transfer knowledge from the external world into their
> memories; rather they build personal interpretations of the world based on
> individual experiences and interactions. Thus, the internal representation of
> knowledge is constantly open to change; there is not an objective reality that
> learners strive to know. Knowledge emerges in contexts within which it is
> relevant. Therefore, in order to understand the learning, which has taken place
> within an individual, the actual experience must be examined. (Bedner et al., as
> cited in Ertmer and Newby, 1993, p.63)

With the movement towards a more constructivist environment, leadership

began to take on a new dimension. A variety of descriptors were beginning to be

introduced in the field of educational leadership, including facilitator, servant leader,

manager, collaborator, and team leader. The constructivist leadership model is referred

to by Lambert et al. (1995) as "the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an

educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose

about schooling" (p.29). The perception of leadership and how leaders can impact the

organization of schools stems from leaders in the educational and business fields. Of

those leaders, many have impacted my life and career.

Key elements I find important in the basis of my study include the ideas

surrounding the sharing of voice and levels of knowing, plus the construction of

knowledge in a learning situation. The intent of autoethnography is to construct

learning based on self and examine the environment through observation. I began my journey with minimal knowledge in the area of educational leadership research, so my goal was to immerse myself in studies about educational leaders and better understand leadership styles and issues facing the school leader.

Chapter Two:

An Exploration of Leadership Styles

Introduction

There are many theories and perspectives in research regarding educational leadership and the impact of the many issues facing administrators. In this chapter, literature about leadership styles will be explored. A review of educational research in the area of leadership begins the chapter and then an overview is provided about styles of leadership, including servant leadership, collaborative leadership, and leaders as change agents. Key disciplines of organizational learning and maintaining balance in leadership are also discussed.

Review of Literature

Hoping to gain a clearer understanding of issues surrounding school leaders in the field, I examined a variety of qualitative and quantitative studies. One study examined three New Zealand co-educational secondary schools. Strachan's (1999) qualitative study examined the practice of three female principals who were self-proclaimed feminist educational leaders. The focus of the study was how feminist educational leadership influenced daily decision making while running a school. The author discussed how emancipatory practice in the area of feminist educational leadership "marries critical reflection with action" (p. 309).

Another recurring central theme discussed how feminists preferred to use power in facilitative ways. Control became secondary to the facilitative power in providing others with support and feedback.

This study was reflective in three areas. First, a profile of feminist educational leadership was constructed even without extensive literature. Second, concepts to this leadership style were located in the practice of the three subjects. Third, the author addressed tensions, dilemmas, and personal costs involved in implementing a feminist education leadership agenda.

The findings of this study emphasized the strengths of each principal as being active and creative in constructing her own feminist leadership practice to effectively meet the needs of her students, instead of passively reacting to the demands of political and school community forces.

Important in any qualitative study, the author stated her biases immediately by stating that she was a feminist author interested in creating a feminist qualitative research design that was personally significant to her. This helped define possible limitations or biases right away for the reader. Instead of stating a definite problem up front, conclusions were drawn as the study enfolded. This is a positive aspect of qualitative studies, as the conclusions so often are embedded in the act of the exploration itself.

The literature review was limited in the amount of feminist educational leadership material. This was not due to a lack of research on the author's part, merely that there was not a huge source on this topic. The author found research on the study

of educational leadership with women leadership as its focus extensive in comparison to educational leadership with a feminist leadership perspective. She also found much of the research to be abstract, homogeneous, and lacking in empirical evidence. Despite these limitations to the depth of the literature review, the material reviewed in this study was, in fact, relevant to the specific topic and themes discussed.

The study highlighted three main themes that emerged: personal value system; school context; and dilemmas, tensions, and personal costs. Identifying themes was very appropriate for this qualitative study. In order to narrow the focus, themes needed to be discussed as a point of reference in the comparison and contrast of participants. Central to feminist educational leadership practice was the ethic of caring, especially when addressing the needs that arose from being oppressed and repressed. The theme of caring was focused on through regard, respect, nurturing, and compassion, thereby building a sense of community and belonging.

The study discussed how the three principals had unique ways of leading due to personal style, and the same themes influenced by feminist educational leadership were evident. These included having a strong sense of cause or social justice, importance for the social welfare of students, and clear guidelines for caring for students. The stakes were high for these principals, as all three worked long, hard hours, and had a reluctance to delegate duties. However, they all loved their work, thrived on the challenge to make a difference for students, and had built strong support networks (Strachan, 1999).

Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell, and Capper (1999) conducted an ethnographic study of one principal over a 15-month period of time. This research explored how administrative leadership was crucial in the successful implementation of inclusive schooling practices for students with disabilities. The study followed the actions of one principal in an elementary school in a midsized midwestern city. A variety of methods were used to gather information, including interviews, focus groups, observations, member checks, comparative data analysis, and dialogue amongst participants.

The theoretical framework described in Reitzug's work *Developmental Taxonomy of Empowering Principal Behavior* (1994, as cited in Keyes et al., 1999), was used to categorize data and helped define research questions that guided the collection of data. The three domains within Reitzug's framework included support, facilitation, and possibility.

Clearly, the focus of this study was on how effective leadership can help develop successful inclusive school communities. Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell, and Capper began by explaining the impact of inclusion of special education students into the general education classes. They defined inclusion from an educational perspective and helped readers better understand some of the legislation surrounding this topic. When the authors focused on leadership and effective leadership practices, there was an extensive use of literature.

In the conclusion, a new element to integrate into Reitzug's framework was introduced, spirituality. The authors utilized this theoretical framework to introduce

qualities noted throughout their research about the principal's leadership. This organization within an existing theoretical framework was effective. In order to provide extended research options for the reader, further steps and questions formulated from the study were listed. In other words, this study encouraged continued research (Keyes et al., 1999).

The Relative Effects of Principal and Teacher Sources of Leadership on Student Engagement with School was research conducted by Leithwood and Jantzi (1991). This quantitative study examined the effects of principal and teacher leadership on student engagement within schools. It explored the principal and teacher leadership influences, as well as the similarities and differences in the school conditions through which this leadership was exercised. Data were collected from two surveys received from a sample of 1,762 teachers and 9,941 students in a large Canadian school district.

The findings were consistent in many respects with evidence provided by other large-scale, quantitative studies of principal leadership effects the authors reviewed. They found principal leadership had a significant effect on student engagement, whereas teacher leadership effects on student engagement were minimal. The most significant findings were focused on the substantial proportion of variation in student engagement explained by family educational culture. Although family educational culture was used as a moderator variable, the results greatly supported the impact of family involvement in the schools.

The review of literature was extensive in the area of defining the framework used in this study. The variables for student engagement were thoroughly researched and discussed, although it would have been helpful to have an example of what the term student engagement looks like in a school setting. Family educational culture, used as a moderator variable in this study, was focused on in great length. This was used as a comparison to the better-known variable of social-economic status (SES), commonly used as an indicator for student success. It was helpful to understand how the factors used as variables were defined in relation to the study.

Leithwood and Jantzi were able to find much literature about teacher and principal leadership, but very little about how this leadership affects student engagement in school. The limited amount of substantial information on leadership/student engagement relationships supported the need for more information on any effects of this leadership; thus substantiating the need for this research to occur.

In Singh and Billingsley's 1998 study, the effects of professional support on teachers' commitment to the teaching profession were examined through the use of a national survey database. This quantitative study questioned the importance of how principal leadership supports influenced teachers' professional commitment, principal leadership enhances teachers' commitment, and principals have an effect on teachers' collegial relationships.

The results suggested that principal leadership support influenced teachers' commitment. Furthermore, the results indicated that the largest effect in the model was that of principal leadership on peer support. The stronger the principal support of

collegial relationships, the greater the teacher commitment level. This study reported that the results confirmed previous research findings, as well as extended the literature on teacher commitment.

Singh and Billingsley's study had a clear focus and stated this focus at length. The problem was significant in that it had theoretical and practical value for the field of educational leadership. Clearly, assumptions were made and a hypothesis stated in the beginning of the article, and again in the middle. The authors stated that they felt principal support also had influence on peer support, therefore affecting teacher commitment (1998).

In the midst of reviewing many studies related to educational administrative leadership, I realized that there was a great opportunity for further study in this area. The topic of how to demonstrate effective leadership in a school setting is an area of interest and relevancy in our educational environment. Throughout my review of research studies, I encountered studies that focused on educational leadership and how it affects teacher commitment and teacher morale. The studies also explored how effective leadership can impact students' engagement at school. Leadership styles were explored in two of the articles, discussing the impact of feminist educational leadership and how spirituality, at the core of leadership, can impact inclusion in a school.

Some of the studies I examined identified specific traits and factors common to effective educational leaders, such as support, strong communication skills, fosters shared goals, uses consensus decision-making, facilitates, and shows care. Many

explored how an effective leader can impact a school environment through the varied day-to-day occurrences and stresses. However, missing from the research studies was taking those occurrences and closely examining issues that are relevant to educational leadership. Through the exploration of these issues as a study of further research, I aim to examine how these issues impact my leadership skills and will guide the leadership capacity of others.

As is important in all studies, the relevancy of what is being examined is vital to sound research. I found relevancy in all the studies I read. Anderson and Jones' (2000) study about the promise and perils of site-based, administrator research, especially utilized an extensive literature base that I will find helpful as I continue my research.

The qualitative and quantitative studies focused on important issues in the field of educational leadership. In the Strachan (1999) and Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell, and Capper (1999) studies, the literature review was pertinent to the topic and thorough. I found the process in how conclusions and further questions emerged from the study to be profound and I structured my research in this same way. As qualitative research evolves, so evolves the heart of the study.

The area of the expression of voice in its full honesty will be important to my study, as it is an autoethnography. Keyes et al. (1999) valued the opportunity for participants to express thoughts, feelings, and frustrations throughout their study, to a point where they assumed some readers might cite that as a limitation. The authors, however, encouraged this design of communication, empowering teachers. This was

an ethnographic study of one principal, similar to how I structured my study. The use of Reitzug's (1994) theoretical framework reinforced the importance of utilizing a framework conducive to specific research methodology, especially since my study will be autoethnographic.

It became increasingly evident to me, as I read the research, how important using previous research frameworks or building upon previous research questions can be. The Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) study was adapted from their previous research as they expanded upon supporting evidence from past research and explored the answers to questions this past research revealed. As I researched my topic, I depended on previous research to help support my examination of effective practices and leadership styles in the field of educational administration. This research is just the beginning of that examination.

In the study of Anderson and Jones (2000), content analysis consisted of coding all of the data and then identifying broad categories and subcategories. They then looked at issues, dilemmas, and themes. I plan on structuring my analysis in a similar way. After coding all the information collected from journaling, I will categorized the data and explore leadership issues. Anderson and Jones stated that, "Often in these studies, findings reflected deeper understandings of practice, the acknowledgment of new dilemmas and contradictions, gaps between espoused theories and theories-in-use, new self-understandings, or new, more complex questions" (p.437).

As I proceed with my research, I am excited to explore, examine, and self-reflect on my own personal practices in the field of educational leadership. Through the use of narrative self-reflection, my findings will most likely be embedded in the text, as well as summarized at the end. I realize that studying my own practice and educational setting will raise issues of objectivity and bias. However, by conducting an action-oriented study, I agree with Anderson and Jones (2000) when they stated that these researchers "tended to see their biases as theories-in-use to be submitted to scrutiny and changes in the setting as data that they fed back into their cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect" (p.444).

Anxious to further explore best practices in the educational leadership field, the research I have studied so far has reinforced that my quest is relevant. The research also validated my decision to use a qualitative approach, as I study my own practices in my schools. There is much written in the area of educational leadership, but many stories wait to be written that can provide a refreshing examination into the heart of leadership and how to model effective leadership in schools. I want to be a part of this exciting research and make a difference!

Styles of Leadership

How leaders choose to lead and structure their schools depends greatly on the style of leadership they display. The research and practices in the educational field show many styles of leadership as effective. This section explores specific styles of leadership, including servant leadership, collaborative leadership, and leaders as change agents.

Servant leadership.

> For a human character to reveal truly exceptional qualities, one must have the good fortune to be able to observe its performance over many years. If this performance is devoid of all egoism, if its guiding motive is unparalleled generosity, if it is absolutely certain that there is no thought of recompense and that, in addition, it has left its visible mark upon the earth, then there can be no mistake. (Giono, 1985, p. 7)

Leadership is a quality that is dependent upon energy, passion, and focus. The idea of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) requires the leader to be introspective about how, why, and who they are leading. To lead is to guide and facilitate and be perceptive to the needs of who is being led. It is the exceptional leader that leads with the patience and perseverance to make the observations of change and progress over time. The selfless acts of putting the needs of those we work with before our own. To encourage the collaboration of ideas and promote positive change are traits of strong leaders.

After reading Sergiovanni (1991), I better understand the four major authorities that administrators are functioning within. *Bureaucratic authority* relies on rules, mandates, and regulations that are set up by the school, district, and state. *Personal authority* looks to individual guile or cleverness and interpersonal style, while *professional authority* appeals to best educational practices, research and knowledge. Finally, *moral authority* focuses on a set of ideas, ideals, and shared values. It is the balancing of these four authorities that becomes the art of administration.

In educational administration, one of the greatest challenges is to balance moral and personal authorities with those of bureaucratic and professional, because the power, money and scientific fact are all represented in the latter two authorities. Having a leading perspective that looks beyond the managerial aspects and focuses on the moral imperative (Sergiovanni, 1991) challenges an administrator to create a community that: upholds values and shares a vision; is committed to achieving goals, and most importantly, cares about each other and the students they teach. "Without tending to the moral imperative there can be no organizational character, and without character a school can be neither good nor effective" (p.316).

Taking a step beyond the realm of manager, decision-maker, and running meetings, into a greater capacity of facilitator, follower of ideas, and caring leader takes great strength and commitment. According to Noddings (1992), one of the greatest tasks of teachers is to "help students learn how to be recipients of care. Unless they can respond to caring attempts, they will not grow, and they will certainly not learn to care for others"(p. 108). I believe this idea applies to administrators as well. Adults need to be reminded how to care for each other and how to care for themselves.

There are many challenges administrators face daily in education, as well as in business and industry. It is the satisfaction of creating a working, living community that is focused on a shared vision and strives for a common purpose that makes an effective leader feel joy and accomplishment. Greenleaf (1977) discusses the difference between a person who chooses to be a leader first as opposed to a person who is servant first, meaning someone who has the "natural feeling that one wants to

serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (p. 13).

Greenleaf claims that those who choose to lead without the "servant" perspective tend

to share a "need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions"

(p. 13). Obviously there are varied degrees to this level of leadership due to the variety

within human nature.

   Collaborative leadership.

   The idea of caring for, and about, the people we work with as a collaborative

unit as opposed to leading with expectations that followers will follow blindly, is

illustrated by Belasco and Stayer (1993). It is known that in the buffalo herd, there is

one head buffalo that leads the rest. The buffalo herd is so dependent on the head

buffalo that when the leader dies, the rest will stand in a group confused and

vulnerable. Knowing this pattern, the Native Americans used to track the head buffalo

and kill him, waiting to slaughter the rest of the herd in their confused state.

   In comparison, geese fly in a "V" configuration with one leader out in front.

When the leader tires, the flock adjusts their flight pattern while the leader falls out of

formation to the back. Still in flight, another goose takes the leader position and

continues until he tires. Teamwork, with the emphasis on collaborative decision-

making and ownership to the whole group, is key to developing an efficient and

successful working atmosphere. In the educational field, the emphasis on creating a

positive environment where staff feels empowered to be a part of the whole picture to

help increase student success is complex for even the most competent leader (Belasco

and Stayer, 1993).

The American Leadership Forum, the brainchild of Jaworski (1996), was developed for leaders throughout the world who shared a vision of greater leadership capacities. Leaders from corporations, small businesses, and education gathered together to experience a program developed to increase effective leadership skills. Groups experienced a variety of exercises focused on an inner journey or quest. Patterned after the Outward Bound adventure, groups were led through a "transformative cycle consisting roughly of three stages: separation or departure; the trials, failures, and victories, including a supreme ordeal; and finally, the return to and reintegration into society" (p.103). Dialoguing in large and small groups, as well as individual journaling helped focus the leaders on assets and strengths that could be supported in each of their situations.

Collaborative relationships can enhance an intense personal connectedness with the people we work with and the focus and clarity of the vision. Five elements Jaworski discussed help to foster this connected environment. He stated that to increase leadership capacity you must first help others to: strengthen the power of self-belief, rely on inner resources and intuition, build deep trust and respect among the group, realize the connectedness with others, and finally, learn how to be flexible and adapt quickly to change and new environments (1996).

Leaders as change agents.

When perplexed by the amount of change and demands coming from all angles of their workplace, my staff will often heroically ask, "What is best for the child?"

It is difficult to fully comprehend the impact that educational reform and changes in instructional expectations have made in the personal and professional lives of teachers and administrators over the years. When trying to find meaning in change, it is essential to gather information at all levels of education, including the classroom, school, district, state and federal levels, realizing all are interdependent. Fullan (1991) helps participants in educational positions learn to create individual and collective meaning from change and make sense of their immediate situations. He stresses that passive understanding is not as effective as taking action to achieve a deeper meaning of educational change.

Fullan goes on to explain a simplified overview of the change process. The *initiation* stage is the initial stage where the process leads to a decision to adopt or proceed with a change. Phase II, or *implementation* is putting the change into practice. The *continuation* stage, phase III determines whether or not a change is institutionalized within the school culture. The *outcome*, phase IV, provides an overview of the outcomes based on the change or changes made (1991).

It is useful to understand the processes involved in change, but more importantly, it is vital to understand the influential factors that can affect the process and cause a positive or negative impact on others. Many forces out of our control can influence the success or failure of the implementation and continuation of change. These may include bureaucratic policies, external pressures from the community and district, approval or disapproval of colleagues, staff development needs and resources, and different transitional stages individuals may be functioning within.

Transitions are a very natural and cyclic aspect of life and the change process. Realizing that some individuals deal with transition with more difficulty, administrators need to be knowledgeable, yet lead with an empathetic heart.

Bridges (1980) described life with many natural cycles that involve change. There are the major transitions that we all are aware of, such as marriage, job loss, new baby, and moving. There are transitions that are unique to the teaching field such as, the moving of classrooms, switching grade levels, implementing new educational reform standards, and working with a new team or principal. All of these transitions, compounded by the number of staff members, can make for a very complex society within a school.

Bridges pointed out how the pace and number of changes at one time can be extremely distressing.

> But it is not just the pace of change that disorients us. Many Americans have lost faith that all transitions they are going through are really getting them anywhere. To be "up in the air", as one so often is in times of personal transition, is endurable if it means something - if it is part of a movement toward a desired end. But if it is not related to some large and beneficial pattern, it becomes simply distressing. (1980, p. 4)

Before a decision is made to initiate a change, Fullan (1991) recommended that the leader consider three areas. First, there must be a practicality and need for the change. Staff must feel the *relevance* of the innovation and not feel the change is frivolous, worthless, or unnecessary.

Second, the school organization, as well as the staff, must demonstrate a *readiness* for the change. Is staff willing and open to change? Will there be enough

training? Does the change address a staff or school need? Finally, *resources* must be available to support the implementation. This may include time, money, curriculum, staff training, and practice (1991).

Effective leaders can introduce change continually, but without the key elements in creating and understanding a learning organization, the changes may never be implemented or continued. According to Senge et al. (2000) a "learning organization involves everyone in the system expressing their aspirations, building their awareness, and developing their capabilities together" (p. 5). The learning organization approach to education opens doors to possibilities and allows for freedom to recreate schools. This approach can be recognized under such other labels as "school reform, effective schools, educational renewal, and systems thinking in the classroom" (p.5).

Key Disciplines of Organizational Learning

Senge et al. (2000) identified five key disciplines of organizational learning. These disciplines are not programs, but a way of studying and practice as people work towards change individually or as a group. The key disciplines Senge et al. referred to include *personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, team learning,* and *systems thinking*.

Personal mastery is the practice of identifying a personal vision, or articulating the results an individual wants to create in his or her own life. When identifying areas of personal mastery it is important to also list the realities that we face that could

create barriers getting in the way of mastery. This process can be helpful, by creating an "innate tension that, when cultivated, can expand your capacity to make better choices and to achieve more of the results that you have chosen" (Senge et al., 2000, p.7). Personal mastery integrates well with the evaluation process teachers experience during the year. The first step in evaluation includes goal setting, which provides teachers with the opportunity to discuss personal and professional visions.

Shared vision is the collective discipline, establishing a focus on mutual purpose. This is a vision that is created through dialogue, sharing of beliefs and personal visions analyzing where the school is headed. Once the shared vision is embraced, then guiding practices and principles can lead the path towards improvement. This can be a difficult and time consuming process, but most critical in establishing trust and a united force ready to face change and make a difference.

All people function within a framework of their own personal *mental models*. These models determine what we see. The discipline of "reflection and inquiry skills is focused around developing awareness of attitudes and perceptions - your own and those of others around you"(Senge et al., 2000, p.7).

Team learning provides an opportunity for groups of individuals to come together and transform their collective thinking. This is often accomplished through dialogue and group interaction. In constructivist thinking, dialogue is where each individual understands the purpose of talk as a reciprocal experience. Each person grows in understanding, seeking interpretations of truth through their own perception (Lambert, 1995). The goal of dialoguing is to provide an experience where people can

become more aware of the context around their experiences and where they can learn how to think together (Senge et al., 2000).

Systems thinking is the last discipline Senge et al. (2000) discussed. This is the practice learned by individuals and groups to better understand change and the change process and how it impacts their organization, thereby enabling them to deal effectively with the forces that shape the consequences of their actions. "The discipline of systems thinking provides a different way of looking at problems and goals – not as isolated events, but as components of larger structures" (p.78). By studying the system's structure as a whole, leaders will be less likely to act as crisis problem solvers and spend more time in proactive planning for the success of the organization.

Maintaining Balance in Leadership

Sergiovanni's (1991) perspective in leading with *heart, head*, and *hand* is key to maintaining balance in leadership style. Leadership from the *heart* involves a personal vision or mastery of what the leader believes, values, is committed to, and dreams about. Leadership is a personal journey and all of the dimensions that make a person unique are immersed in the work the leader performs. Sharing the heart of leadership establishes the foundation from which the school can move forward.

The *head* of leadership includes the theoretical basis leaders have developed throughout our life and how they reflect on their circumstances in relationship to these theories. This dimension of leadership includes the processes and strategies developed

by leaders within the structure of their organization. How leaders think, problem solve, and strategize fall within the *head* of leadership. Obviously, there is a definite interrelationship between dimensions since how people think and problem solve is also influenced greatly by our belief system, values, or *heart.*

Finally, the actions taken by a leader through decisions, policies established, management behaviors, and interpersonal relationships all help compose the *hand* of leadership. As the common saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words." There is no more profound an event for staff than when leadership takes on an active role within the organization. The actions taken by leaders are directly impacted by the heart, head, and hand of leadership; thereby creating a circle of all three dimensions interrelated.

Passion to make a difference and lead with soul and impact are intrinsic to many effective leaders. The courage to lead with such strength, with greatness and humility, to lead with hearts, heads and hands (Sergiovanni, 1991) takes time, reflection, commitment, and patience. With the efforts of great leaders of past and present, new leaders can take strength to reflectively listen, learn, and speak in a voice that holds passion and energy to move forward. Without the voice, silence may in fact stifle great events and ideas that hold the foundation of learning.

A woman named Claire Nuer (cited in Jaworski, 1996) spoke so eloquently to a group of leaders in Paris when she shared a story reflecting her experience as a Holocaust survivor. It spoke of peace and of passion and most importantly how one voice *can* make a difference.

An image of two birds, sitting on a slender branch of a tree in winter was flashed on the screen. Beneath the image were the words:
"Tell me the weight of a snowflake," a coal-mouse asked a wild dove.

"Nothing more than nothing," was the answer.
"In that case, I must tell you a marvelous story," the coal-mouse said.
"I sat on the branch of a fir, close to its trunk, when it began to snow – not heavily, not in a raging blizzard – no, just like in a dream, without a wound and without any violence. Since I did not have anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs and needles of my branch. Their number was exactly 3,741,952. When the 3,741,953[rd] dropped onto the branch, nothing more than nothing, as you say – the branch broke off."
Having said that, the coal-mouse flew away.
The dove, since Noah's time an authority on the matter, thought about the story for a while, and finally said to herself, "Perhaps there is only one person's voice lacking for peace to come to the world." (Jaworski 1996, p.197)

Reflection

Oh!
The places you'll go!
You'll be on your way up!
You'll be seeing great sights!
You'll join the high fliers
Who soar to high heights
(Seuss, 1990, pp.12-13).

Seuss describes life's journey as an incredible event to be relished and celebrated. Yet, not only does he mention the highlights of the journey, but also the bang-ups and hang-ups and confusion, loneliness, and fear along the way.

As I reflect on instructional leadership, I can't help but feel that Dr. Seuss wrote this picture book with educational administrators in mind. It represents the cycles and processes of transition in a simple and refreshing way that correlates with many of the readings I have reviewed in my quest for understanding the characteristics of effective instructional leadership.

The more I explore leadership, the more I am confident in the realization that I have been preparing for leadership for many years. Through education, various teaching positions, work in staff development and curriculum, acting as an elementary school principal, my marriage, and mothering three young daughters, I have gained many invaluable life experiences that have ultimately led me to where I am now. I often think of it as a destined journey that led me to educational leadership. Yet, I wonder what is destined journey and what is it like? How do I know the way? How can I make a difference? These are all questions I have been asking myself throughout my quest to understand leadership.

Chapter Three:

An Autoethnographical Journey

Introduction

In this chapter I will be addressing the use of autoethnography in my study. An explanation of how my study was conducted, data collected and coded, and the reporting of my findings will be discussed. Generalizability, validity, reliability, and ethics of my research will be addressed as I describe my use of methodology and how it best allowed me to present my research.

Why Autoethnography?

Ellis and Bochner (2000) discussed how personal narrative encourages dialogue and a way to discover purpose and unite what is experienced, perceived, known, and trusted in research. Personal narrative creates the "search for better conversation in the face of all the barriers and boundaries that make conversation difficult. The stories we write put us into conversation with ourselves as well as our readers," allowing us to show "how we changed over time as we struggled to make sense of our experience" (p. 748).

Our experiences in life and our responses to those external and internal experiences can shape and mold us into the individuals we are today. Realizing the risks involved in conducting a qualitative self-study of my leadership and producing a believable and meaningful dissertation, I decided autoethnography would allow me the best opportunity to achieve my purpose. This study will undoubtedly encompass

generalizations, subjectivities, and narrow-minded perspectives; however, I will focus my efforts in utilizing some traditional strategies in qualitative research to help decrease these tendencies and increase trustworthiness.

Autoethnography may be quite challenging for the author in that authenticity of representation must be at the forefront of data presentation and reflection on meaning may appear chaotic to the reader. "The inside-out act of organizing and presenting materials so that they provide insight while also remaining true to the creator's vision present one of autoethnography's greatest challenges" (Wilkins-O'Riley Zinn, 2004, p.30).

Nicholas Holt (2003) responded to these many challenges as he prepared a critique representation of the legitimation of his autoethnographic manuscript going through the review committee process. Holt faced criticism for veering from traditional quantitative research with stringent criteria. In his review, Holt (2003) discussed Sparkes (2000) and Garratt & Hodkinson (1999) who suggested that autoethnography is at the boundaries of academic research because such accounts do not sit comfortably with traditional criteria used to judge qualitative inquires. Indeed, traditional criteria used to judge qualitative research, in general, may not be appropriate for autoethnography.

Holt was faced to come to terms with the questions of generalization, validity, and reliabililty. He had some reviewers who "valued autoethnography but had concerns over its rigor." Other reviewers "clearly did not think that autoethnography constituted scientific research" (2003, p. 8). Holt uses the work of Morse, Barrett,

Mayan, Olson, and Spiers, (2002) to support that more attention be focused on

constructing data rather than using purely evaluative methods. The researcher is

reflective in constructing information validating the data, as opposed to "the inclusion

of evaluative checks to establish the trustworthiness of completed research" (p. 11).

As cited in Holt's (2003) article, Richardson (2000) discussed the five factors

used in critiquing personal narrative papers, including the analysis of evaluative and

constructive validity techniques. These criteria included:

> (a) Substantive contribution. Does the piece contribute to our understanding of
> social life?
> (b) Aesthetic merit. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Is the text
> artistically shaped, satisfyingly complex, and not boring?
> (c) Reflexivity. How did the author come to write this text? How has the
> author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text?
> (d) Impactfullness. Does this affect me emotionally and/or intellectually? Does
> it generate new questions or move me to action?
> (e) Expresses a reality. Does this text embody a fleshed out sense of lived
> experience? (2000, pp. 15-16)

The use of reflective and visual, sometimes dramatic language may be

represented in an autoethnographic study and these guidelines were set up to help

provide a framework for directing investigators and readers.

Part of the problem with the acceptance of qualitative research is the nature of

the study of self. Qualitative researchers are encouraged to consider how their personal

subjectivity impacts the process. The researcher is used as an instrument in the study

(Glesne & Peshkin, 1992 as cited in Holt, 2003). "In ethnography, the subjectivity of

the researcher is seen as a resource for understanding the problematic world they are

investigating, as something to capitalize on rather than exorcise" (p.15).

However, the use of autoethnography goes beyond just the study of self.
Experiences and others around them influence, not just an individual experience, but
also a social experience. The intent of such criticism is to:

> preserve the very types of dominant viewpoints that those using
> autoethnographic approaches may wish to question. If autoethnography is
> intended to confront dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt
> to reclaim marginalized representational spaces (Tierny, 1998), it is quite
> ironic that the method itself becomes marginalized by the academic review
> process. (Holt, 2003, p. 16)

It is the identity of the researcher, which includes both behavior and emotion
that is developed through social construct, "reflecting a mosaic of factors such as the
individual's personality, biography, immediate situation, and partners, the immediate
and larger cultural and historical context, and material resources" (Winograd, 2005,
p.xiv). We must keep in mind that personal narrative is an exposure of not only an
individual's personal journey, but a reflection of the social context surrounding the
experience.

> We are shaped by our external circumstances, but we have agency in shaping
> our own destinies as well. Our identities are shaped by power relations at the
> local level of our personal interactions and at the larger societal level. Identity
> also is reflected by the individual's expression of personality and desires to
> negotiate the demands of particular situations. While we may have one
> somewhat stable core identity, across time and situations, we also have many
> identities that are constructed as our situations vary. (Winograd, 2005, p. xiv)

Generalizability

The issue of generalizability occurs in this area of methodology since only a
single subject is being examined, as opposed to several subjects that can be compared
and help in creating generalizations for a larger population. In a school setting, there is

rarely agreement on what constitutes reality. The reality in my study will be my

attempt to assemble and organize information and observations from my personal

narratives as one person sees and experiences it. My goal is that my readers will then

take my experiences and assimilate the meaning into their own lives and find some

importance in the information. The burden of generalization therefore lies within the

reader's interpretations as they create meaning for themselves (Barth, 1998).

> Generalizability is constantly being tested by readers as they determine if it
> speaks to them about their experience or the lives of others they know.
> Likewise, does it tell them about unfamiliar people or lives? Does a work have
> what Stake calls 'naturalistic generalization,' meaning that it brings 'felt' news
> from one world to another and provides opportunities for the reader to have
> vicarious experience of the things told? (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 751)

Validity and Reliability

Validity within an autoethnographical study may be determined by whether or

not it increases communication between readers and someone other than themselves.

To be valid, the writing should evoke in "readers a feeling that the experience

described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 751).

Knowing full well that personal narratives present validity issues and in order

to enhance the trustworthiness of my research, I've included a clear description of my

collected data and the methodical manner of coding and interpretation of the data, plus

I have shared my writing with other colleagues for input. Most importantly, to find

validity in my research, it is within the reach of all readers to realize how my

experiences can in fact relate to, and impact their life journeys.

Reliability is more difficult, since I wrote a personal narrative from a situated location recreating past, dreaming future, and documenting present experiences. According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), there is no such thing as reliability in autoethnographic research. However, reliability checks can occur by asking others to comment, identify areas needing clarification, and offer interpretations.

The research was shared with other colleagues who provided a sense of grounding in reality to insure reliability in the writing. I chose to use selected input from others, but have not included specific responses or reactions to the research in the dissertation so readers can create their own perceptions and not be influenced by comments of others.

Ethics

Realizing the importance of generalizability, validity, and reliability, I have discovered ethics equally important in autoethnography. Since ethnographic research takes place among real human beings, the researcher must take care to obtain consent when necessary and not exploit or harm those involved (Genzuk, 2003). In autoethnography, the study is about the researcher in a cultural setting that may include the influences of other people, events and places. It is not the study of others, but does include their influence on the life of the researcher.

The purpose of this study was to examine my leadership within a school environment. As much as I have attempted to ensure anonymity by changing all names of people and places, I am concerned there may be some resemblance of events that could inadvertently bring possible embarrassment or discomfort to my staff, students,

or families. Reducing this possible effect, I realize that this research will not be published until five years after the study was conducted. Many staff and families will have moved on and students graduated to another school.

Also, the research conducted was about my leadership and my understanding of how I was impacted by issues I faced. This was not a study about the students, staff, or families of the schools. The events I shared from my personal narratives in the study were chosen by me due to the impact they had on my leadership.

Forest Hills and Oak Hills

Forest Hills and Oak Hills are two rural schools in a district of about 8,000 students. The schools are situated in the country, surrounded by rolling hills, farms, and houses stretched far beyond the school grounds. Students are bused to school, rarely riding bikes or walking.

One of thirteen schools, Forest and Oak Hills were considered one school on two campuses. Forest Hills was a small, one hallway primary school that contained our kindergartners through second graders. Oak Hills, two miles up the road contained our third grade through fifth grade students. Between both schools there were 305 students.

While two district schools were full Title One schools and four others, partial Title One where there were a large number of low socio-economic families, Forest and Oak Hills had below 8% of families in this category. Our population was comprised of lower to middle class families employed by a local university and high technology

corporation. The majority of the families were highly educated and very involved with the schools.

Forest and Oak Hills had eleven certified classroom teachers, a librarian, a learning specialist, and music teacher that covered both schools. There was no counselor or physical education teacher. Between both schools, there were fifteen classified employees who performed duties ranging from custodial to small group instruction to secretarial. Most of the staff had been working at these schools for most of their careers. Many had children that went through the schools and some had grandchildren attending. One of Oak Hill's teachers had spent all of her twenty-seven teaching years in the same classroom in the intermediate grades.

This was my third year as a principal with Forest and Oak Hills. Previously, I had worked closely with this staff in my role for three years as curriculum, instruction, and assessment specialist for the district.

Research Project

For a period of one school year, from August 2001 through June 2002, my goal was to conduct a thorough self-study using autoethnography. I was totally immersed in a school environment daily that would allow me the opportunity to examine my leadership role and how I was impacted from the many emerging issues my students, staff, community, and I faced. To maintain the integrity and confidentiality of those children and adults mentioned in my dissertation, all names of places and people have been changed. However, the details of events and what occurred during the year are accurate from my perspective and records kept.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to get a varied and complete picture of the many aspects of my daily leadership experiences, I collected data in a number of ways. By the end of the year, I had information from meeting minutes, letters, memos, e-mails, agenda items, newspaper articles, a two-week time study log, and personal narratives in my journal.

Time study log.

For a period of two intensive weeks, I kept a time study log to record the specific areas of focus and duties I performed at 15-minute intervals. My hope was to gain a better perspective on the amount of time I spent performing certain administrative tasks compared to others. Kathleen Cotton's compilation of research in "The Schooling Practices That Matter Most" (2000) was helpful in creating specific categories to mark leadership activities throughout the day.

Cotton identified and disseminated effective schooling research covering a period of thirty years. Her goal was to provide educators with the research base to determine which elements were most effective in improving student achievement. Based on her informed interpretation, she identified effective schooling attributes into the categories of *contextual attributes* and *instructional attributes*. Since this was a self-study on leadership, I chose to use the contextual attributes Cotton discussed that I suspected would be used most often since instructional attributes related more directly to the classroom teacher. I will be discussing each attribute more in depth in Chapter 4. The attributes I used in my data collection and also in categorizing my findings

included: A) *safe and orderly school environment, B) strong administrative leadership, C) primary focus on learning, D) maximizing learning time, E) monitoring student progress, and F) parent and community involvement* (Cotton, 2000, p. 2). I added an additional category that was not included in Cotton's work, *G) general administration and overhead.* This is the section where many of the organizational and management tasks during the two-week log were categorized. The term overhead refers to the financial management of school administration.

Since some activities I performed during the day could actually be under more than one category, I used my best judgment in placing a situation under the category that best met the primary purpose of that activity. For instance, when meeting with parents regarding a child in special education, I could have categorized this time under *parent and community involvement* or *monitoring student progress*. Since the primary purpose of the meeting was not to increase or encourage parent involvement, even though this certainly was the case too, the main purpose was monitoring the student's academic progress. This was the category where I recorded the minutes.

At the end of two weeks, I calculated the percentage of time spent in each category and created a spreadsheet and a circle graph displaying the data.

Journal.

Personal narratives through daily journaling were recorded each evening. Emotions, feelings, dialogues, impressions, perspectives, descriptions, negotiations, details of the mundane, and unexpected surprises were all included in my writing. The intent of the journal was to capture the reality I experienced as an administrator at the

organizational and emotional level. This was where I processed events that emerged and exposed my individual weaknesses and strengths. It was during the journaling where I gained the perspective that allowed me to face myself as a leader and how I was impacted personally through this experience.

At the end of the year, I began to organize my journal entries by coding and labeling each experience by theme. During the coding process, themes were sorted using colored highlighters. Some of the themes were interrelated and others sorted into multiple categories. For instance, the 9/11 event was sorted into the themes of parent and community involvement, safe and orderly school environment, and strong administrative leadership because this tragedy impacted all three of these categories significantly. I marked certain issues with several colors.

Once sorted into multiple themes, I decided to continue to re-sort based on the most dominant theme a journal entry displayed, which was often the one that had the most impact on me. Some of my original themes included student learning, staff issues, parent and community, and building management. It was at this point I discovered the themes began to naturally fit into Cotton's (2000) categories that I used for the time study log. I reevaluated each theme to insure it was appropriately represented and titled the themes according to Cotton's categories. After each entry was categorized by theme, it was placed into chronological order.

The selection process of which entry to write into my dissertation was difficult. My choice was determined by the impact of the event, how the story best fit into the flow of the dissertation, and my personal connection to the experience. I used many

direct quotes from my personal narrative, but much of my writing was paraphrased directly from the journal entries and other data using personal recollection. Chapter 4 is my story and reflections.

Additional data.

Other data collected and categorized by theme included: meeting notes; agendas; calendars; professional notes taken from phone calls; interviews and meetings with students, staff, and parents; memos; letters; e-mails; and newspaper articles. This information was critical with the integration of my personal narratives, adding fact and written records of events that occurred. Combined with my individual thoughts and perspectives, these additional data provided a sense of grounding and foundation to help balance the emotional impact of many events. Through the collection of data, I analyzed issues focusing my research around these educational leadership topics and how they impacted my leadership.

Participating in an autoethnographical study was a personal and professional journey for me. I have defined and questioned meaning that evolved through self-reflection and discovery. I faced vulnerable areas during my self-discovery process, but attempted to do so in an honest manner; thereby creating an opportunity to make a difference for myself and a difference for others who may find meaning and new knowledge through my writing.

Chapter Four:

Discovering, Sharing, Reflecting

Introduction

During the yearlong process of gathering information through narrative

journaling, meeting notes, observations, and the two-week time study log, I discovered

insights to how I spent my time as an administrator categorically and the significance

of where my focus lay as issues emerged. This chapter is organized by sharing the

time study log (See Table One) and the graph showing the percentage of time spent

under each category (See Table Two) during my two-week period of data collection.

Then I have chosen to share my integration of personal narrative under Cotton's

(2000) categorical themes organized by those in which I spent the greatest percentage

of time during those two weeks to least amount. My personal narrative discussion

integrates direct quotes from my journal and also written recollections of events based

from my journal entries.

Please note that by sharing categories from greatest to least this does not in any

way reflect that one category is more important than another. The two-week time

study log also does not accurately represent the most impacting experiences during the

year. The parent and community involvement category may have received the least

percentage of time during the two-week study log; however it was the most powerful

section when compiling data from my personal narrative. During the coding process, I

also addressed the percentage of journaling events that were building, district, or

community related. This helped me identify how much time was spent on issues beyond the actual school building, staff, and students. This was reported in each section.

Leadership Time Study Log

The time study log was conducted over a period of two weeks in the month of February (See Table One). The duration of two weeks was chosen to provide enough time and continuity in gathering data, but not too long to become cumbersome. February is generally a month where a two-week block without holidays or other interruptions is most likely to occur. Based on Cotton's (2000) framework, I categorized time spent in each category every fifteen-minute block. At the end of two weeks, I totaled each column and calculated percentage of time spent in each category (See Table Two).

Table One displays the amount of time spent in each category for every fifteen-minute block during the day for two weeks. Since this was only a two-week section of my year's study, generalizations were made but may not be the whole story. This was why the personal narrative helped balance what may have impacted me as leader that did not show up in the log.

Details regarding each category will be discussed under each section in this chapter, however the percentage of time spent in each category is examined below. Time spent in *general administration and overhead* management was the greatest percentage of my time study log with 26%. This was not a surprise to me since I

oftentimes found myself overwhelmed with the amount of management tasks involved in school administration.

Twenty-four percent of my time during the two-week log was spent under *strong administrative leadership*. I would expect this to be the case with much of my time managing staff and the instructional aspects of the school. This category, along with *monitoring student progress*, at 17% of my time, related directly to increasing and maintaining student achievement. Monitoring student progress was a smaller percentage of time during this two-week period than expected because much of this area was dependent on meetings with staff and parents to discuss student progress and develop plans of action. A different week studied may have shown a higher percentage of time spent in this area due to the meeting schedule. This was the case for all categories. The percentage of time spent in each area was dependent on my schedule and what events occurred during this two-week block. The integration of personal narrative along with the log data created a more balanced perspective over the period of a year.

The last three categories *maximizing learning time*, eight percent, *primary focus on learning*, seven percent, and *parent and community involvement*, five percent, all were fairly equal in time spent. With the integration of personal narrative in this chapter, parent and community involvement actually showed much more of an impact on leadership than the time study logs reported. The purpose of the log was to examine the percentage of time spent conducting administrative tasks throughout the day for

two weeks. Most activities had the capability to overlap into a variety of categories, but I placed them according to where I felt they had the most impact. An overall picture of the many responsibilities, integrated with reflections from journaling provides a comprehensive view into my journey as leader.

Table One:
Leadership Time Study Log 2/4/02 through 2/14/02

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	TOTAL
7:30-7:45	105	45	0	0	0	0	0	150
7:45-8:00	45	45	0	0	0	0	60	150
8:00-8:15	0	60	0	0	60	0	30	150
8:15-8:30	15	45	0	0	75	0	15	150
8:30-8:45	30	45	0	0	75	0	0	150
8:45-9:00	30	45	0	0	75	0	0	150
9:00-9:15	15	60	0	15	30	0	30	150
9:15-9:30	0	60	0	15	45	0	30	150
9:30-9:45	15	30	0	45	45	0	15	150
9:45-10:00	15	30	0	60	45	0	0	150
10:00-10:15	15	45	15	30	45	0	0	150
10:15-10:30	15	45	15	15	30	0	30	150
10:30-10:45	15	30	15	30	15	15	30	150
10:45-11:00	15	30	15	15	15	15	45	150
11:00-11:15	15	30	0	15	15	15	60	150
11:15-11:30	0	30	0	15	15	15	75	150
11:30-11:45	0	60	0	15	30	0	45	150
11:45-12:00	15	60	0	0	45	0	30	150
12:00-12:15	30	45	0	0	45	0	30	150
12:15-12:30	30	60	0	0	30	0	30	150
12:30-12:45	45	60	15	0	0	0	30	150
12:45-1:00	60	45	15	0	0	0	30	150
1:00-1:15	15	30	15	30	0	15	45	150
1:15-1:30	0	30	15	30	0	30	45	150
1:30-1:45	0	30	15	15	0	30	60	150
1:45-2:00	15	15	30	15	0	30	45	150
2:00-2:15	15	15	30	30	15	15	30	150
2:15-2:30	0	15	45	30	15	0	45	150
2:30-2:45	0	15	45	15	15	0	60	150
2:45-3:00	0	15	45	30	15	0	45	150
3:00-3:15	75	15	15	0	0	15	30	150
3:15-3:30	75	15	15	0	0	15	30	150
3:30-3:45	15	30	0	0	45	15	45	150
3:45-4:00	15	30	0	0	45	15	45	150
4:00-4:15	15	45	15	0	45	0	30	150
4:15-4:30	15	30	15	0	45	0	45	150
4:30-4:45	0	15	15	0	30	0	90	150
4:45-5:00	0	30	15	0	15	0	90	150
5:00-5:15	0	15	15	0	0	0	90	120
5:15-5:30	0	15	0	0	0	15	75	105
5:30-5:45	0	15	0	0	0	30	15	60
5:45-6:00	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	15
6:00 on	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	15
TOTAL	780	1425	435	465	1020	315	1575	6015

A. Safe Orderly School Environment
B. Strong Administrative Leadership
C. Primary Focus on Learning
D. Maximizing Learning Time

E. Monitoring Student Progress
F. Parent & Community Involvement
G. General Admin. & Overhead

Table Two:
Percentage of Minutes Worked in Each Category

Percentage of minutes worked in each category

Safe & orderly
school
environment
13%

General
administration &
overhead
26%

Strong
administrative
leadership
24%

Parent &
community
involvement
5%

Primary focus on
learning
7%

Monitoring student
progress
17%

Maximizing
learning time
8%
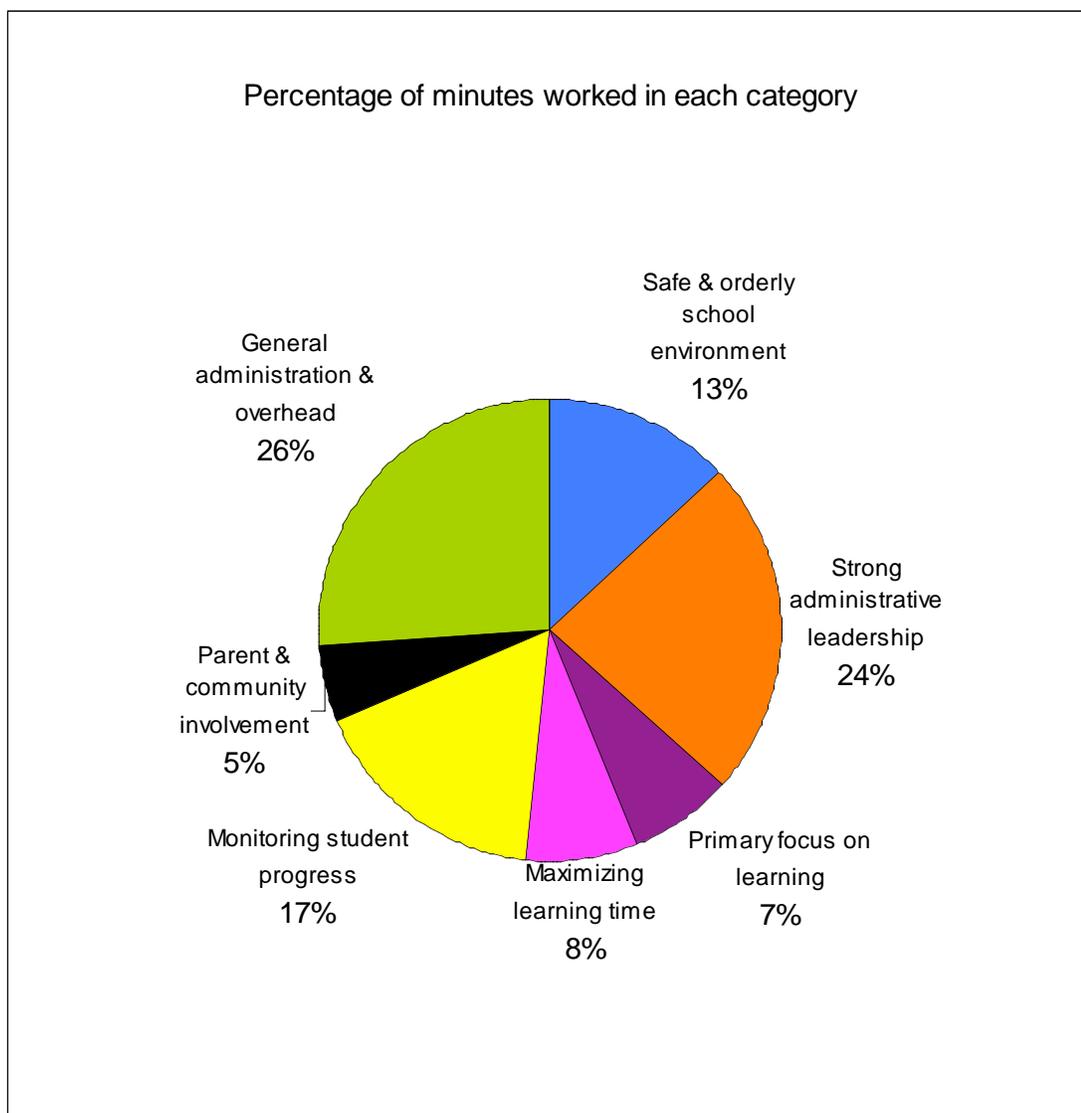
My Personal Journey

   General administration and overhead.

This was an area not discussed in Cotton's research (2000) due to not relating to student achievement; however it is truly the reality of school administration. Both Senge et al. (2000) and Sergiovanni (1991) addressed this area when discussing the administrative tasks and responsibilities so critical to the daily life of a leader.

Data collected over a two-week period of time showed this to be my greatest percentage of focus. Tasks in this category included the following: phone calls, e-mailing, preparing budget and financial plans, pro-active planning for schedules, managerial and organizational jobs, maintenance, and conflict resolution. Even though all of these tasks could be interrelated with the other categories of effective schools, I chose to pull them out into a separate category. Twenty-six percent of my time was spent under this category during my two-week collection of data (Table Two). My journal entries showed that three-quarters of my time in general administration was spent performing district tasks that directly or indirectly impacted my school buildings. One quarter of my journal entries focused on building and parent specific tasks.

It was easy to focus on large issues at hand, but the reality of school administration is that the small, sometimes menial tasks, required great amounts of my time daily.

Driving back to my schools, I'm thinking about the time. I have a meeting with Sara, third grade teacher at Oak Hills, at 12:30 today. Today is my Forest Hills day, so I decide I need to check in with staff and students there first. I pull into the gravel parking lot that is showing signs of standing water and faded painted parking spot lines. The new landscaping looks healthy and fresh. As I walk in to the building, I am struck with the warm, pungent smell of school lunch. It must be taco day because of the spicy beef aroma circulating down the hallways. At least lunch is now served from an empty classroom instead of the hall. Without a cafeteria, it is interesting to watch the anguish health inspectors' display when they watch the creative ways in which we have to serve lunch. All meet code, but it is definitely not the most desirable way to serve food. (Journal, November 7th)

After dropping off my day planner and cell phone in my office, I poked my head into the adjacent office and said hi to Evelyn. She handed me a stack of receipts to approve and let me know about phone messages to return. I grabbed the stack and headed down to the kindergarten room. I wanted to circulate in the classrooms and touch base with the students and staff.

Once I had made my rounds through six classrooms, taking notes of questions to answer and things to do, I made my way back to the office to gather my papers, keys, phone and check to make sure I had anything I might need to work on at Oak Hills. Saying good-bye to Evelyn, I headed out the door on my way to my other school to meet with Sara. Instead of returning back to Forest Hills later in the day, I had decided to just remain at Oak Hills. It was in between meetings and student contacts that I would return to the stack of phone calls and answer e-mails.

I realized why I rarely take breaks. I have an unfinished letter to parents on my computer, a half written note to a student's parent, a message to call a company that I have no number for and a return number for another company, another message to call

a Forest Hills' parent and a note that Lisa was going home sick. Where to start? Prioritizing had become a task I must use daily. I finished the letter on my computer. It must go out today to both schools, so I attached it by e-mail to Evelyn and called her to intercept it and print it for the primary students.

I sat down with Darcy on three different occasions in January to review our budget information. My two schools were combined as one school, with one budget. However, I needed to categorize line items based on primary and intermediate needs, including two libraries. Darcy was a master at budget records and we worked together to review how money was spent categorically in years past. I then would take this information and create a new budget knowing I needed to show an eight percent cut overall, based on the information shared by our district finance officer at our January 25th meeting.

Over the past few years, schools had experienced budget cuts due to declining state supported funds to districts. I found it more challenging with two small schools to budget than some of the larger schools. There was more flexibility in moving funds around for larger schools and they only had one facility to maintain.

On March 11th, I attended a district meeting reviewing additional budget cuts at the state level. An additional $92 million dollars would be cut from education across the state for the next school year. Approximately $220 million would be requested from the voters in May to borrow from the educational endowment fund. Our superintendent shared that we wouldn't know how this would directly impact our

district until the school board met the following week. However, we were told to plan for staffing cuts across our schools.

> Driving back to Oak Hills, my mind is full.
> The rain falls and the pavement is wet. My heart is heavy and my thoughts foggy, as I reflect on what lies ahead with budget and staffing cuts. How do I begin to strategize and organize my schools to capitalize on strengths and insure a positive learning environment for kids? I let the sound of the rain falling on my windshield wash away my thoughts. One step at a time. Emotions will have to stay in check. I pull in to the parking lot with a load of papers ready to tackle. (Journal, March 11th)

To add to the challenge of state cuts, it was a negotiation year where we bargain with certified and classified staff for a new contract. I had been asked to represent the elementary administration and serve on the contract negotiations team. This proved to be a huge time commitment, not to mention an exhausting venture. The district team consisted of a secondary administrator, the human resources director, the finance director, our district superintendent, the district-hired attorney, and me. The staff was represented by the certified union president, classified union president, and staff representatives. The district prided itself in using a collaborative model where both parties presented critical issues and the process determines how to resolve these issues through negotiations.

The district team met separately on two occasions to determine our critical issues, specifically focusing on salaries and benefits. April 10th, 12th, and May 5th were dates the negotiations team met. Each meeting was at least eight hours long, facilitated by leaders from each group. On the last meeting, May 5th, we began negotiations at 2:00 in the afternoon, still needing to resolve the main issues.

We are well into the night by now, and this is our sixth caucus of the day. Both teams are exhausted and we are stuck on the salary and benefits issues. Of course, this is the most costly, yet essential of all issues to be negotiated. I am leaning back in a cushioned chair, Ted is lying across the windowsill, and our superintendent found a pillow and is stretched out on the hard carpeted floor in the human resource office. We wait. We drink coffee. We check our watches. It is now 2:00 in the morning and we feel we aren't any closer to resolution. Our greatest intent is to complete negotiations and go home with a drafted agreement before dawn.

A few jokes are shared, but mostly we wait. A knock on the door. 'We are ready.' Our group returns to the boardroom where the union waits. After an hour of caucus, their group presents their latest rebuttal to our proposal. We listen. We ask for another caucus and so it goes. I can barely focus at this time of night. My eyes are blurred, my contacts dry. I think I'm hungry and thirsty, yet I'm full. Sleep would come so easily if I stayed still. Instead, I pace and move from seat to seat. (Journal, May 6th)

We questioned our attorney whether or not we could compromise a little bit further. The suggestion came up to sacrifice one day of staff development and decrease the amount of time for preparation days to half in order to get closer to the salary and benefit proposal. We reviewed our plan with the team and prepared to go back to the union representatives. It was 3:30 a.m.

5:00 a.m. and I am driving up my driveway. I am exhausted and my brain frazzled. Successful as it was, agreeing upon a draft of a new contract didn't come easily and without some frustration. I crawl in bed, only to get up again in two hours to face two schools full of smiling, energetic children. (Journal, May 6th)

Reflection.

The everyday life of a principal involves multi-tasking and moving from one unfinished project to another, all the while trying to juggle the critical pieces of the school: student achievement, building relationships with parents, and keeping a safe environment. However, it is the administrative details that keep the ship afloat.

Organizational and managerial skills are key as I navigate through my day. As I reflected on all the time spent in this area, it didn't surprise me. The management of a school requires a sense of deliberate management of time, regardless of the reality of how much time is actually available. Oftentimes I found myself in school on the weekends completing the tasks that required the most attention to detail. It was during these times I could focus and manage my piles to do without interruption and prepare for the week ahead.

I also realized early on in my career, that this was one area I disliked the most. I preferred to have direct contact with students, staff, and parents without the tedious budgets, documentation, e-mail responses, and memos. However, the better organized and proactive I am, the more relaxed and less stressed I am under stressful situations. The immediate needs are met more efficiently when I have a sense of control over my managerial domain.

In reflection, I chuckle at how many times I left something undone to move onto another task or issue more important at the time. The tasks eventually get done, regardless of the amount of time in a day. Serviovanni (1991) discussed this as part of the bureaucratic authority leaders are faced with in administration. These are the mandates and regulations set up by policy and regulation.

Senge et al. (2000) also described the structure of schools as a system where leaders need to study the whole structure to better organize and manage in a proactive, not reactive manner. Schools are a complex organization even without the human dimension of students, staff, and parents. By focusing on the goals of the whole

structure and not reacting to individual situations as they occur, this allows leadership to move into a more proactive model (Senge et al., 2000).

Strong administrative leadership.

"Schools with desirable levels of student achievement are consistently shown by research to have strong administrative leadership" (Cotton, 2000, p. 8). Strong administrative leadership includes the visibility and accessibility of the principal, holding and communicating a clear vision for the school, monitoring teacher and student performance, shared decision-making, using student data to develop improvement plans, and providing resources for staff development.

Twenty-four percent of my time during the two-week data collection was spent conducting tasks supporting strong leadership (Table Two). Tasks included preparing and conducting staff meetings and inservices, monitoring classrooms, holding student performance and individual teacher meetings, and researching resources to share and demonstrate best practices. Of my journal entries, twenty-two were building related and three were district related.

> Welcome back to staff! So much preparation in preparing for a new year. One surprise as I became a principal was I never truly have a summer. I close one door to a year past and immediately open a new door to the year ahead. Planning and reflecting on the year ahead. How do I set the pace….how fast, how challenging, how to motivate? (Journal, August 20th)

I sent out my welcome back letter to staff in early August inviting them to our first meeting back to school on August 27th. I excitedly planned and focused my energies on making sure this kick-off meeting would be meaningful and positive. My agenda included a warm-up activity where individuals filled out a survey and shared

results with a partner. I also included refreshments and plenty of time for everyone to
mingle and catch up on summer experiences.

I moved the meeting into an area of celebrating our strengths. This was where I
shared our student achievement results and my administrative survey feedback. We set
individual and group goals for the year and discussed roadblocks we may experience
in striving for these goals. At that point in groups, staff shared what they needed from
each other and what they needed from me as principal. Support, visibility, time to
listen, time to problem-solve, and follow through were at the top of the groups' lists
for what they needed from me. The power in taking the time to reflect and honor each
other's strengths and needs was evident. Dialogue was rich and meaningful and set the
tone for a new school year.

We moved into the nuts and bolts section of the meeting and staff took dutiful
notes and asked many questions. This may not have been the soul of the meeting, but
it was critical in making a smooth transition to a new school year. We discussed
communication plans, emergency plans, Occupational Safety and Health
Administration (OSHA) compliance materials, handed out blood spill kits, and set
staff meeting dates for the year. Welcome Back!

On September 10th I met with my teachers for our first staff meeting since
school began. As a third year principal for these schools, I felt very strongly about our
lack of focus and strength in reading instruction. I had observed materials being used
regardless of instructional level of student, whole groups being taught the same skills
regardless of strengths and weaknesses of the individual, and witnessed new teachers

coming to Forest Hills and Oak Hills needing instructional resources, only to find empty rooms and no curriculum guidelines from the district level. The history of decentralization in the district and school-based decisions was showing an impact on these two schools.

I purposely focused one of my professional goals in this area. "Goal 1: All students will be competent readers by the time they leave Forest Hills and Oak Hills." In order to achieve this goal, I identified an action plan including the articulation and alignment of the Language Arts curriculum across the grade levels. The first step was to begin the dialogue with my teachers.

At our first staff meeting, I shared current research about reading instruction and then had the teachers discuss the following issues: *How we teach reading, how to best meet the needs of our students, instructional leveling and what that means,* and the *use of reading curriculum.* Out of this initial dialogue came some rich conversations regarding assessments used to determine next steps for our students. The teachers came to some agreements about the use of Dibels and Individual Reading Inventories, how to best integrate instruction of vocabulary and comprehension skills, flexibly leveling students and next steps. Our journey had begun.

At the primary level, students had traditionally remained with the same teacher all day long. After many planning sessions, the teachers decided to use flexible grouping and level students for reading skill work by instructional level. A letter was sent home on September 24th explaining this new structure.

> After administering assessments to all students…we analyzed the results and observed students as they worked. Students were then placed in groups appropriate to their learning rates and levels. Flexibility is key to making this program a success, and movement of students to appropriate groups for skill work is necessary to meet the instructional needs of all children. (Journal, September 24th)

Later that day, teachers spent time with me designing the upcoming October 11th staff development day. Topics of interest included the beginning of articulating what was being taught in reading kindergarten through fifth grade, discovering what other schools were doing, what the district policy was, how to fit in guided reading, and record keeping.

As to be expected, there were challenges to change in how reading was instructed. The afternoon of September 25th, I was asked to join Laura and Chris for a short meeting. As I sat down, it was obvious that they were frustrated. The meeting started out with "We knew it must be your third year here as our principal, because now all the changes happen. We are very concerned about this leveling bit for reading. We don't agree and don't want to share our kids with other teachers," claimed Laura.

Emotions were high. "How can you support this, Erin, when all has been fine in the past? Don't you trust us?"

I listened to both teachers. I asked questions based on research and concerns they shared. We moved beyond emotion to a mutual conversation of what we felt was best for students and after an hour, came to a compromise for a trial run in flexible grouping. I planned on conducting observations and would monitor assessment results. Our agreement was to try the new structure for a month and then we would revisit our

decisions. One underlying factor that was not shared was that a new member of their team had joined them from another school that fall, who strongly supported this new movement and they felt devalued in a way. David was not included in this conversation strategically on the part of the other two teachers. My leadership task ahead was to focus on Laura and Chris' strengths and support them in creating a positive environment for students while undergoing change.

Structural change is never easy, but begins with passion and belief. As our focus on reading instruction grew, so did our vision as a staff. With some creative energy, I developed a plan to hold an extended day kindergarten twice a week with the purpose of "providing additional time for intensive reading skills training and literature immersion for specific kindergarten students" (Journal, October 10th). Our belief statement was developed by the staff stating,

> We believe that competent readers gain preliminary reading skills at an early age. Phonemic awareness includes early training and interventions with sound letter relationships. Extended day will provide staff with more time to assist students who need additional reading instruction. (Journal, October 11th)

Our proposal was presented to our District Leadership Team who supported our efforts. We were ready to assess and recommend students for participation.

Every other Tuesday, I acted as representative for the elementary principals on the District Leadership Team (DLT). The team consisted of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of human resources, communications and business directors, and a representative from high school and middle school administration. We were called the large DLT on the days we meet and on the alternating Tuesdays, the

district officials met alone as the small DLT. There was an unspoken feeling that all of the real decisions were made on the small DLT days.

As we went through the lengthy agenda on November 7th, the discussion traveled to a situation at one of the high schools where the principal arrived to work and found a large contingency of angry parents waiting outside her office. Apparently, an English teacher had failed to preview a text that was assigned for homework over the weekend. The material was on the state-adopted list, but dealt with sensitive material from a South African country. There was a section in the material that graphically described the homosexual rapes of young boys. This was not a question of censorship for the material, but a situation where informed consent was not provided to families. Because of this serious mistake on the part of the teacher, all books were collected from both high schools pending further investigation. I made notes to go back to my teachers and remind them of the importance of previewing all films and materials.

"How on earth can a teacher NOT read the material they are requiring of the kids to read?" asked our communications director. He tended to be a very opinionated and outspoken member of our team. Bob was in charge of communications for our district and oftentimes asked the most poignant and difficult questions. All members, most likely thinking the same thought, stumbled with some kind of response in defense of the teacher. When it comes down to it, there was no excuse for not previewing and preparing materials prior to instruction. That's a teacher responsibility. However, I'm thinking of the stress my teachers were facing this year with new

materials in reading/language arts, science and social studies. This created an unrealistic workload for teachers and to expect them to know and preview every new lesson and resource could be unreasonable. I wondered once again how I could provide additional time for my teachers to come together and share ideas about what was working and what was not. My most common frustration was inadequate time to meet as professionals and dialog.

My topic was now up for discussion. Counseling services had been a hot topic for our district. Last spring, a group called Stand for Children organized with the message that all elementary schools should have at least one half-time counselor. This very vocal group began appearing at all school board and budget committee meetings demanding that the district reorganize funding to provide counselors. Some of the elementary schools had counselors on staff, but by choosing to hire a counselor, less money was available to staff with teachers. Historically, building administrators had been able to consider the allotted hours provided to hire certified teachers and make decisions how that would look based on building priorities. This year, my staff and I agreed that we would do everything possible to decrease class size at the primary grades, knowing full well that our music, library and counseling would decrease.

I really missed not having someone on staff professionally trained to deal with on-going counseling issues elementary kids dealt with. When I attended a conference, another school district presented the idea of contracting out for counseling services to an outside professional. I presented this concept to DLT as an option to consider. I, for

one, did not feel the need to have a fulltime counselor in my buildings; however I did have on-going needs that should be referred to a professional.

The District Leadership Team's initial response was "no way." The certified contract language and the financial implications would not allow for this type of service. What would we do with the counselors on staff now? How would we determine how much to pay or what services they provide? These were all questions I realized needed to be answered, but my feeling was that we had a problem, we needed to begin looking at the variety of ways we might be able to address it. There were many different and creative ways to solve a problem while still addressing contracts and budgets. At some point in time, as a district, we needed to be thinking beyond the ordinary! We agreed as a team to bring this issue back to the administrators to discuss the many ways we could meet counseling needs for our schools. This meeting would become known as the "think tank".

Sara, a third grade teacher that transferred over to Oak Hills last year, sat in front of me eager to share on this same afternoon. She came from a very low socio-economic school where there was very little parental involvement to a small rural high socio-economic school where parents were volunteering in full force. Sara was a great e-mailer. She communicated well and often. She let me know she wanted to meet in person and talk about her professional life. She also assured me in the e-mail that no, she didn't want a transfer. Curiosity led me to think perhaps she was thinking about pursuing her master's degree to allow her to move into administration. Sara was a strong teacher-leader and had great strengths in the area of curriculum.

Closing the door, Sara sat down in my large Oak Hills office. We could hear the children's' laughter and balls bouncing outside my window as the third, fourth and fifth graders played at recess. Sara began by assuring me she was doing fine and wasn't unhappy, but….she had come to a place in her teaching where she needs more depth. She went on to say that she had been thinking about taking time to really delve into curriculum for her classroom. She wasn't asking for money or resources, but wanted to know if she could take seven to eight days unpaid and work on curriculum. She would work here at the school, but would need a substitute. My initial response was to support her efforts. Sara is a leader in this area and the staff and district could really benefit from her work.

I encouraged Sara to write a proposal with what she has in mind, including how this will affect her work in the classroom and how she is willing to share with her colleagues. This actually will buy me some time to see if I can come up with some staff development or grant money to help support her. (Journal, November 7th)

Sara and I discussed further where she was headed. We talked about the possibility of further education and curriculum or administrative positions. She sounded as if she was at a fork in her professional career and I encouraged her to do some research. I gave her the names of two highly respected people at the local universities for her to contact. "In many respects, I see myself in Sara years ago when I was ready to stretch beyond the classroom into a more global view and work in the field of education" (Journal, November 7th).

Administrative Leadership is key to moving a school in positive directions for the sake of student achievement. As I reflected on my goals at the end of the year, I wrote,

I am very pleased with progress made this year, but realize that it is just the beginning. Forest Hills successfully implemented an extended day kindergarten program for students at risk in the area of reading. We had between eight and eleven students involved in this program throughout the year. Kindergarten students who were identified as needing additional help in

early literacy, stayed until 1:30 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Screening tools included the kindergarten interview data and Dibels data.

  A certified teacher, funded through a reading grant, taught this class along with help from classified assistants. The program Optimize, early literacy strategies and one-on-one skill instruction were tools used to increase competency. Student progress increased throughout the year and all students showed gains in the Dibels data collected.

  First and second graders were also assisted two to three times a week in reading fluency and comprehension. A certified teacher and assistants supported low-leveled readers in the afternoons. Read Naturally and various reading strategies were used in small groups to increase the reading competency of these students. Assessment data on all of these students showed progress in fluency in all but one student by the end of the year.

  Opportunities were provided for all staff members to obtain reading training and observe peers throughout the year. Many of the certified staff used reading as professional goal activities. Two teachers set up classrooms utilizing the Guided Reading format. One teacher piloted Accelerated Reading in his classroom. With a school wide focus on reading as our school improvement goal, our staff was moving in one direction using a variety of successful strategies.

  This was a very exciting year with instructional leveling happening at all grades, new programs in place and the second year of a foundational support from our new reading adoption. Staff had many opportunities throughout the year to discuss reading topics with colleagues and to implement new strategies. For the most part, teachers found this time valuable, based on feedback collected. The next steps will be to provide grade level sharing events for teachers to swap ideas of successful programs and strategies across the district. (Goals Reflection, June 10th)

Reflection.

Having worked directly with some administrators with weak leadership skills during my career, I feel very passionate about this category. Strong leadership can be displayed by various traits, as discussed by Greenleaf (1977), but it is the undying perseverance and patience to be an observer and guide a following. Leading is a systematic art. There is room for personality, humor, and style. My individual style lends itself to building relationships and providing a safe environment where my staff

feels valued and is willing to take risks. These are important traits for me to strengthen as a leader.

In reflection of my journaling, I feel I am striving to accomplish this by making myself readily available to my staff no matter how busy I may be or how pressing an issue may be. I tell my staff they are a priority and I make them a priority. Listening is the key I have found to great communication skills. So often I find myself talking too much and trying to solve the problem, instead of listening. When I deal with students, I don't solve their problems. They talk it through. This is the tactic I have been trying with my staff and I listen more, speak less.

One of my greatest challenges is acting as facilitator between individuals or groups of individuals who have significant differences of opinion over an issue or procedure. When faced with conflict, I rely on the trust that has been developed through personal mastery and shared vision, and take the participants through a process that hopefully will enable them to look beyond their own mental models (Senge et al., 2000).

Just as Laura and Chris were functioning within their own frame of reference, influenced by the comfort of their own mental models. I needed to intervene, providing a safe environment where both individuals could maintain dignity, yet express emotions. When given an opportunity to list frustrations, hurts, and perceptions while the other person listened, both individuals responded cautiously. The meeting was intense. Both had a chance to share and then both had the task to brainstorm for reasonable solutions.

The outcome resulted in awareness from each side of the perceptions held by both individuals and a list of possible solutions and changes that needed to be addressed. A new mental model was introduced and provided a safe, structured way to explore emotions and create solutions.

The collaborative leadership example shared by Belasco and Stayer (1993) displays the differences between leading together by taking turns, as geese model during their V-shape flight formation. Or, on the other hand, leadership can be displayed through more of a dictatorship model where one leads and all others follow with no input or voice.

Conflict is better managed when you have a following based on trust. Taking my staff to a level of high standards and challenging them to go the extra mile, only comes after modeling and relationship strengthening. The power in leadership is when others take ownership in being part of the movement forward and help lead. Leaders can't lead very far without followers.

Monitoring student progress.

The monitoring of student progress through "collecting and reviewing student performance data, reviewing test results, grade reports, attendance records, and other materials to identify problems and taking action based on findings" is another critical attribute of effective schools (Cotton, 2000, p. 12). Cotton also discusses the impact non-school related forces have on student progress. Out of the schools' control are factors of social and economic status, home environment, and emotional or physical abuse.

I found my two-week collection of incremental data focused on the following: identifying and supporting individual learning difficulties, record keeping, English language learners, special education, and the alignment of curriculum assessments. Seventeen percent of my time during the two weeks, 1020 minutes, was spent in the area of monitoring student progress (Tables One and Two). My journaling throughout the year included one-sixth of the entries to be district, parent, and community related and the rest were building specific.

My journal entry, dated October 29 states,

Last night, in preparation for Talented and Gifted testing, I discovered that the third grade would not mesh with my fourth and fifth graders with the testing. The third grade Terra Nova cognitive test utilizes teacher direction and talking throughout. It would be quite disturbing to the other students if I were talking.

As building administrator and past district Talented and Gifted (TAG) coordinator, I was responsible for assessing those students suspected of giftedness cognitively or academically in math and reading.

My next three or four days will be swallowed up with testing a few students to see if they qualify for TAG. TAG?! Talented and gifted…I have struggled with this concept since I was teaching. I believe all children are gifted and display strengths differently and uniquely. To test a child, draw a cut-off line statistically and make the claim, 'Your child is gifted' can be discriminating and hurtful to the child and family of a student that doesn't make the cut-off score. Even more difficult is when a child comes from a literature-rich environment, attended preschool and comes to school with a wide range of life experiences. Many of these children are early readers and very verbal. Early assessments show high percentile rankings that may lead to TAG identification. However, research has shown that by third grade, many of these students level out and no longer outshine classmates. Therefore, a 'de-tagging' occurs. Try explaining that to parents. (Journal, October 29th)

TAG is a state mandated, non-funded program, leaving districts scrambling for ways to financially support the program. A parent TAG complaint from two years ago, when I was district coordinator, instigated an investigation from the state department. The complaint addressed the district's lack of identification and servicing of TAG students consistently at all grade levels and schools. Our district was now required to show additional proof of identification and servicing of TAG students in all schools. Forest Hills was especially targeted because, I believe, we had highly enriched children exposed to early literacy and preschool experiences who achieved early on. We typically put these students with potential giftedness on lists until third grade. It was an opinion we held as professionals to wait before identifying for TAG too early, but the state mandate required an identification label placed on those children prior to third grade.

> I know students that display characteristics of a gifted child have unique needs to be met. However, the majority of our students have challenges presented to them daily regardless of TAG identification or not.
>
> Picking up a group of students to be tested today, I overheard them talking about why they were being tested. One little girl spoke up saying, 'We're smarter than everyone else.' This is the stigma I would like to move away from. I explained to the group about how we all have strengths and challenges and these tests will help teachers understand their strengths so we can better teach them. (Journal, October 29th)

On October 30th, I met with a family in the morning whose little boy was displaying quite complex behaviors. Grant was only six and attended a Montessori school for kindergarten last year. His past teacher had some concerns that Grant had extreme difficulties making transitions from one activity to another. He would begin

building with Legos or blocks and no one or no activity would draw him from his focus. Yet, during other activities, he displayed a great lack of focus and inattention.

Grant was displaying the same pattern of behaviors in first grade. The school team reviewed his results from cognitive and academic testing with the family. The new district psychologist, who was hired directly from private practice, was at the meeting to share information. "This guy is definitely 'academic'." The psychologist proceeded to talk theory and make speculations that blurred the parent's vision. He wanted to solve all of Grant's issues around the table. I had to step in at one point and clarify that we were not medical professionals and that we could only go over the facts and data. The parents must present the school data to their physician for medical recommendation. The medical diagnosis I was referring to was Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. This is a medical condition and not to be diagnosed by school staff.

The new psychologist had some powerful suggestions and behavioral modification ideas and was freely making recommendations. I found it odd that he was so willing to tell parents how to parent, or teachers how to teach, when he had not even met the child. Purely clinical…I asked that he please make an effort to observe Grant before our next meeting. Later in the spring, Grant was diagnosed with autism and we were able to provide additional adult support for him and set up a structured schedule and routine that was designed for his scholastic success.

Later that same afternoon at 4:00 p.m., I sat around a large rectangular table in a small seminar-style room. I was the first one in the room, so I walked around and

read a few of the inspirational posters on the walls. I noted the plate of miniature

carrots on the table covered with a napkin. A chart board was set up at the front of the

table. As I sat down at my place, a few more people entered. The demeanors of those

that entered were serious and ill at ease. I readied myself to represent two young girls

at a Services for Children and Families (SCF) family meeting.

Kristy and Sasha came to Forest Hills two months earlier. The files were as

thick as I'd ever seen for a six and seven year old. Many conversations went back and

forth between their last grade school and the specialists they worked with and us. We

immediately called a team meeting with Rowe, the girls' mother and our school

specialists. The girls were in SCF's custody and had just returned to Rowe's care. The

part that disturbed me the most was Kristy's past history of extremely violent behavior

and her diagnosis of reactive detachment syndrome. We needed to be proactive and

have procedures in place immediately for the success of these children.

The meeting that day was to come together as agencies to discuss the progress

mom has made to prove she was capable of keeping her children with her. The

emotional energy in the room when all were present was stifling. The facilitator,

representing SCF was calm and nurturing in voice. Next to her was a manly, gum-

chewing attorney representing the girls' mother. Casa had a representative present, as

did Adult and Family Services. Of course the girls' SCF caseworker was there as were

the girls' teachers, our special education teacher and myself.

As the meeting progressed, many of the listed items the mother had to

accomplish were checked off. Rowe needed to complete rehabilitation for drug use

and have random drug tests proving her success. She needed to show proof of employment and have a safe, clean home for the girls. The mother, appearing angry and aggressive, was reminded by her attorney to let him speak on her behalf.

The school team then discussed Kristy and Sasha's success at their new school. I mentioned how we had to rearrange the busing situation to transport Kristy and Sasha on the smaller bus. The large number of students and chaos and noise was too much for them to handle on a regular school bus. They now rode the smaller bus and were experiencing better success. The one issue remaining in the morning was the battle Kristy displayed in getting ready for school and actually getting on the bus. Disturbingly, the bus driver observed Kristy hitting and biting her mother every morning. Once on the bus, she reportedly calmed down and handled the ride.

The pent-up anger was rising to the surface as Rowe questioned why SCF still retained custody of her three daughters. Her attorney demanded a meeting to clear this up. I noted the anger and aggression mom was capable of and her distrust of the system. In Rowe's mind, no counselor was qualified to treat Kristy, and yet, this was part of her recovery plan. A young mother with three children all suffered from being removed from mom's care and placed into foster care for an extended period of time. The two I worked with had anger issues and separation issues.

After the meeting, I thanked the teachers who provided their input and made plans to follow up with contact with our behavioral consultant to make sure a plan was in place for these girls at school. I also noted that this family would be a great candidate to receive help from our community resources for food and clothing.

The Services to Children and Families (SCF) organization has received such poor publicity due to some high profile cases of abuse and the lack of protection of children. However, my connection with this agency during my time as school administrator has been a positive one. I have had a number of instances in the past three years where I have had to contact SCF. One, immediately during my first year as principal, involved two Oak Hills' boys. The boys lived in a trailer with a developmentally disabled mother. Coming to school was a victory, but there was much to do before they could go to class each morning. We fed them breakfast, washed their hands and faces, put clean clothes on them, and then sent them to class. Eventually the boys were taken from their mother and they moved to Washington with their father.

> I often think of how these boys are doing. It's hard to make up enough ground when given such a debilitating beginning. I worry about the cycle of neglect, the impact of transience, academic weaknesses. I hope in the depths of my heart that somehow, in some way, I can touch a child in such despair and make a difference. Is this a selfish wish? Am I trying to make myself feel better about how I'm living? Am I trying to find some importance in what I do every day in some sick egotistical way at the expense of the despair a child lives in by destiny? Or, is it truly out of care, the essence of why we choose what we do in the first place? I like to think my career is an extension of who I am. (Journal, November 1st)

In following up with my comments from November 1st, I had to make another report to SCF the following day. A fourth grade boy entered our school new and we experienced significant problems with his behavior since the beginning of school. He groped other boys in the groin and grabbed their bottoms. Socially, this student knew no boundaries. He invaded space, grabbed shirts, pulled backpacks from behind,

talked too closely, and teased. It was obvious that he was trying to make friends, but did not have the skills necessary to make this happen successfully. That was only one piece of the puzzle. This young boy was traumatized as a first grader according to his father. He came home from school one day with his penis painted silver. To this day, they still don't know how it happened. No silver paint was found at his old school, or at home. They sought counseling for a few sessions, but got nowhere.

Our recommendation to parents was to use a plan at school involving our behavioral specialist. Then we would provide names of outside counselors. This was agreeable. Our behavior specialist met with Steven on a couple of occasions and then called parents to arrange a meeting. Dad said he'd get back to the specialist and never returned the call.

I called SCF to report suspicion that Steven was groping his little brother at home. This was shared on the bus to other students by the little brother. By law, as an administrator, I am a mandatory reporter for suspected child abuse or neglect. Even though it was not considered a criminal offense, since Steven was only nine years old, the parents are held responsible for maintaining the safety of their children.

Later that same day, an SCF worker, with whom I'd worked in the other case, called me to say she was at Forest Hills ready to interview Andrew, the younger brother. I was at Oak Hills at the time ready to begin another round of TAG testing. I told her I would be right over. I put the testing on hold and drove over to Forest Hills.

I find it incredibly important in my role as child advocate to be present during child interviews. I hope I can be a comfort to children who know and trust me.

During the interview, Andrew was relaxed and very verbal. He brought much information out in our conversation that was not asked for. For instance, Anna, the SCF worker, told him that her job was to keep kids safe at school and at home. How are things going at school? At home? He talked about trick or treating, Nintendo, tornadoes with great fear and interest, and how his middle brother annoyed him. He shared about being grabbed and hurt, 'which is not nice'. Anna spoke further with Andrew and took notes. (Journal, November 2nd)

From here, Anna would talk with the father and share Andrew's conversation. She encouraged continuation of counseling and follow-up with the behavioral consultant. We planned to watch closely at the school. For all the bad press the SCF receives, I have had positive interactions and support from each caseworker. I have witnessed true dedication to children and families.

Student progress can be so incredibly stunted when a child's basic needs are not being met emotionally and physically. This was the case for Scott when he entered kindergarten. His story was a mystery unveiled slowly by the father and grandparents. Scott's bright smile and vibrancy for activity warmed our hearts immediately. However, it became obvious to his teacher and me that this little person was showing signs of depravation in language development. He threw temper tantrums, crawled under tables, smeared feces on the walls, and became oppositional when redirected.

We conducted assessments and had meetings with his father and grandparents within the first month of school. Our concerns were that Scott was lacking some key elements necessary to succeed in school. What we discovered from our meetings was shocking. Scott had lived with his mother for the first four years of his life. He was in and out of shelters due to the violent relationships his mother experienced. Throughout

the course of his young life, Scott was kept in his bedroom to eat, watch videos, and was kept in diapers out of convenience until he was given to his father at the age of four. Knowing the level of basic needs Scott had been deprived of in his early development, we developed an intensive plan to ensure his school success. Part of his plan was additional time in kindergarten, extra adult assistance, and increased opportunity for positive reinforcement.

February 4th I had spent all morning preparing for a special education re-eligibility meeting for a third grade girl. Our school team began to strategize ways to handle the different directions the meeting could turn. The father and mother of this student were highly volatile and believed their child was gifted. They could not fathom the possibility of a learning disability. A learning disability is defined by our district as the gap between a child's cognitive level and his or her academic achievement. Therefore, it is quite possible to have a gifted child with a high IQ show a significant gap between potential and performance. However, trying to explain this to the parents had been unsuccessful to date. In fact, the father kept threatening to involve an attorney. Dad was viewed as a bully by our school team and very intimidating. He wanted a quick fix, guaranteed on a short timeline.

My role as administrator was to build relationships with this family outside of the official meetings and design a plan that best supported this little girl. I met with the parents on a number of occasions to try to ease their concerns and break down the mistrust of school professionals. I tried to best prepare the parents for the upcoming meeting for Marie. I sensed a desire to cooperate and movement towards trust, despite

the obvious denial and grief knowing their daughter was experiencing challenges. My

only hope was to keep the process going so we could continue to support Marie with a

specialized plan.

Our school team prepared for discussions around Marie qualifying or not for

special education, the claim her IQ test was invalid, retesting cognitive ability,

comparing IEP and 504 plans, and preparing for next steps. Marie had been receiving

specially designed instruction due to an earlier eligibility, claimed by parents to be

caused by visual impairments. Our team needed to share progress to date and

determine whether or not she continued to be eligible for special services. By the time

we played devil's advocate in all situations, we felt prepared for the next day's

meeting with the parents.

> All morning I think about the upcoming meeting for Marie; however, not as
> much as Lisa, my learning specialist. She needs a lot of reassurance and
> support right now. Lisa's become a target by Marie's parents as being lazy, not
> caring, and trying to get out of her job. Nothing could be further from the truth!
> Lisa is the most dedicated, caring individual I have worked with. She keeps
> each individual student's best interest in mind every day. Wow, it is one of
> those situations where no matter what you say or do; you'll not be able to
> change the mind of the pre-judgment. (Journal, February 5th)

The parents arrived at 11:00 and the team gathered in the library. Six school

and district professionals joined the team and the father immediately began the

meeting on a defensive note. "I don't care about the national norms for Marie. Tell me

how Forest Hills tested on this test," he proclaimed. We explained that this cognitive

test was not given to all students. This test was nationally normed by the age of the

child and compared with all students at that age across the nation, not just at Forest Hills.

Moving past this issue, we were able to share progress, which was two years worth of growth in just one school year. Fabulous data! This was not the norm for a learning disabled child. We looked at the possible options for Marie and after much discussion, we went the route of finding her not eligible for special services any more. The father did not fully agree, as he felt Marie could be eligible, but didn't need the services. He was right on the point that we could support her eligibility either way, but a typical eligibility showed discrepancies in gaps of ability and achievement between 20-23 points. Marie went from a thirty-point discrepancy to an eighteen-point discrepancy in a one-year period of time.

The team placed Marie on a 504-accommodation plan to protect her rights for accommodations in her normal school setting. At the end of the meeting, the father looked directly at Lisa and proclaimed, "I would like to thank the three of you," and he named the other teachers sitting at the table, excluding Lisa, "for all of your hard work with Marie. We really appreciate it." Lisa handled herself very professionally, although I knew it must have hurt inside knowing she was the deliverer of instruction all year for Marie and the main reason for her success.

A letter dated February 11th, was addressed to these same parents regarding their older son, Harrison. Harrison was a fifth grader who had tested out of fifth and sixth grade mathematics. A plan was needed to insure Harrison was receiving the appropriate rate and level of instruction in this area. Choices were presented to the

parents to have Harrison attend the middle school in the morning for math class and

then return to the elementary school. Or we could have arranged an individualized

plan for math. This was the route chosen.

> One option was to continue as planned, but let Harrison complete the curriculum for the middle level math over the summer at home. Another option was to provide additional weekend homework to cover more material. The problem with this option was that we were then combining four adults in the planning and instruction for Harrison and it could prove to be overwhelming and confusing. The last option was to have Harrison be home schooled in middle level math during the evenings and weekends. This was the option chosen. (Journal, February 11th)

Harrison successfully completed each chapter test in class and was fully monitored by

both elementary and middle school teaching staff.

Life for Kristy at Forest Hills was deteriorating. She brought her baby doll to

school each day and refused to release her. As schoolwork became more difficult and

demanding, she began to display oppositional behavior and violence. Kristy was

removed from the classroom nearly three times a day to provide a safe place for her to

release and control her anger. It was obvious to school staff that her multitude of needs

were not being met in this typical school environment. In a letter dated March 14th, to

Kristy's physician, I wrote, "Currently Kristy appears very oppositional. We have

instituted a plan that includes positive reinforcement and also negative consequences

for non-compliant behaviors. Her two focus goals are to follow adult direction and be

kind to others." I outlined the plan for the physician and asked that he expand on the

observations that she was displaying symptoms of post-traumatic syndrome. Our need

for his professional recommendations to help support Kristy at school was evident. We

needed to devise a plan for success in the current setting, or look at alternative placements.

In the meantime, it was suspected that Kristy and Sasha's mom had begun abusing drugs again. There were reports that the children wandered the neighborhood at all hours, Kristy climbed the roof, and that the yard had become a dumping ground for garbage. I kept in close contact with the girls' caseworker and after a home visit on March 20th; I received a call from Anna. She alerted me to the fact that the home was covered in filth and the mother was despondent. She wanted to detain the girls at school, knowing that there was a meeting scheduled with the mother that same afternoon. The intention of SCF was to, again, remove the children from the house.

I was deeply saddened by this news, knowing that Kristy, Sasha and their little sister would be put into another foster home and taken from our schools. However, I knew this was in their best interest. They could not continue to live in these conditions.

The mother entered the school at 3:30, ready for a typical IEP meeting. The three girls were in tow and so I had one of our teachers take them to a separate classroom at the farthest end of the school to play. I then led Rowe to the meeting room. The minute I opened the door, she stiffened and started to cry. Inside sat the caseworker and a police officer. She immediately knew they were going to be removing the children. Obviously, the IEP meeting was not going to take place as she expected and Anna explained they were removing the children. Rowe started to throw

objects against the wall and started to bolt out of the meeting room, screaming for her

children. Fortunately the girls were isolated down the hall.

The police officer contained her and tried to calm Rowe, while Anna went

down the hall to talk with the girls. I followed Anna, shaken and disturbed by what I

was witnessing. Once in the classroom, we found the three girls busy playing with

blocks and coloring. Anna explained that their mother needed some help and that they

would need to be strong and go with her to a safe place. Kristy jumped up and buried

her face into me and wrapped her arms around me, crying. The other two, smaller and

not wise to the meaning of Anna's words, went back to their play.

> The screams of the girls' mother will haunt me forever. It came from the
> depths of her soul and rang of anguish and despair. Yet, as I held this fragile,
> thin child in my arms, I knew that she deserved better. I walked Kristy to
> Anna's car and got her settled in the back seat with her sisters. Her eyes were
> glazing over and her withdrawal evident in survival. She had been here before
> and dealt with emotional trauma and detachment disorder. Any gains made in
> the past six months were extinguished in this twenty-minute period of time. I
> ran back to my office and collected three stuffed animals. I brought them out to
> the girls and let them know how much we cared for them and loved them. As I
> turned to leave while the car drove away, I watched Rowe leave with the
> officer to return to her own, empty house. Her blank, angry gaze stared right
> through me. I entered my small, quiet school and cried. (Journal, March 20th)

Reflection.

Kids come first and that cliché has to be my first priority in my school

leadership role. As Cotton (2000) shared, many factors are within are control for the

school environment and the instructional contexts. However, out of our control are the

environmental conditions these children are living in and the state of the child coming

to school each and every day. "The need for care in our present culture is acute. Not

only is the need for caregiving great and rapidly growing, but the need for that special relation – caring is felt most acutely" (Noddings, 1992, p. xi).

Keeping my emotions in check was difficult when I first became a principal, but became easier as time marched on. Part of my heart has had to become numb to those environmental conditions I have no control over. Watching drugs and criminal activity destroy families, leaving the children behind to survive, causes great pain. We gather the innocent child into our schools and try to meet his or her basic needs even before expecting learning to occur. As I meet and love and care for each child, I take great pride in even the tiniest steps towards progress. I have to. If I couldn't, I would only feel defeat for some of these children. The future holds very little hope for their success. The tiniest action or word of encouragement is my thread between losing hope and giving new life. All children can learn and I uphold this with my staff and with my school families. This is done through what I say and through my actions.

How I choose to manage and lead is a complex web involving many significant factors. Focusing on the relevancy, readiness, and resources for my schools before initiating change can help ease transitions and maintain a healthy trust level. Most importantly, leading from my heart, head, and hand will help establish a balance of leadership for myself, keeping in mind the importance of all three dimensions (Sergiovanni, 1991).

A safe and orderly environment.

A safe and orderly environment consists of a variety of tasks varying from the proactive to the reactive response. The visibility and support of the principal, a warm

school climate, proactive planning, agreement about standards and behavioral expectations are all areas of focus for this category (Cotton, 2000). Thirteen percent of my administrative time was spent under this category during my two-week collection of data (Table Two). Many of the tasks documented included security walks around the building, monitoring halls and playground, greeting students, and being visible in hallways and classrooms. When analyzing my data, the majority of my journal entries and two-week categorical data focused on building issues with five community and county agencies, and seven district entries. Even though creating a safe and orderly environment showed only thirteen percent of my time spent over the two-week period, based on my narrative journaling, this category was one of great impact on me as principal and my staff, students, and community.

"Elevated radon level found in Oak Hills library" (Herald, August 7th). The school year had not yet formally begun and high radon levels were documented in the school library based on a June test. "According to the Oregon Health Division, radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is found in the soil and seeps into buildings. Long-term exposure to high levels of radon increases the risk of developing lung cancer" (Herald, August 7th).

Our school community would overreact to this discovery unless I crafted our response carefully. The district increased ventilation throughout the library pushing out the air and planned on retesting prior to the return of students. By August 8th, test results were within acceptable levels. My response to families included a letter describing radon, the testing results, and all that was being done to prevent high levels

to continue. Thankfully, the proactive response by the district and my communication with families kept the possible concern at a minimum by school opening.

As I prepared how to respond to our families regarding the radon, I reflected on our security issues from a previous year while I was principal at these two rural schools. I knew our parents were much more sensitive to safety issues due to past history, and I feared would react with panic.

January 26th, the year before, was a day I will not forget. It was the beginning of months filled with fear, mistrust, and sometimes terror for my school community. It was the beginning of remolding how I thought, felt, and acted as an administrator to whom everyone looked for guidance and answers to difficult questions.

I was attending a conference in another city when I received a call from my secretary from Forest Hills. Evelyn was quite stressed on the phone when she recounted the attempted break-in from the night before. Vents were crushed, tunnels dug under the building, windows cracked, but most importantly, all phone lines and computer connections were cut. Communication was at a standstill for this tiny rural school. She assured me all was fine. The district was handling the phone and facility issues, so she convinced me to remain for the rest of my conference.

Around 10:00 a.m. the following day, when I hadn't heard anything from my two schools, I called Forest Hills. No answer. This concerned me, so I called my intermediate school two miles away. Darcy answered. She was unusually calm, assuring me all was organized and running smoothly. I asked her what she was

referring to. She was shocked. Had I not heard? Forest Hills had received a bomb

threat early that morning before students had arrived. The custodian answered the

phone to a voice claiming a bomb had been planted and would go off…Boom! The

arriving students were diverted to Oak Hills and Forest Hills evacuated.

I raced back to the schools to find all staff and students safe. The police

reopened Forest Hills that afternoon, finding no evidence, but we kept all students at

the intermediate school until the end of the day. Later that day, we held a debriefing

session. We identified what went well and what changes needed our attention. The

staff was quite shaken, fearful and feeling violated. It was a powerful experience to

share emotional responses to the events of the day. I documented that we needed to

work on a communication plan for parents, create a parent holding tank when they

come to the school in crisis, draft an evacuation plan, and remember to take all student

medication and emergency contacts upon evacuation of the building.

As a result of this experience, I worked closely with a detective and the

sheriff's department. We created a plan for being proactive in case of a repeat offense.

Unfortunately, we had another chance to put our plan into action. On the morning of

February 3rd, I wrote to my school community,

> I am quite saddened to be writing yet another notice about a threat of violence towards Forest Hills. This morning a note was found taped to the front door of the school threatening an explosion. Police officials arrived immediately and proceeded to block off the school area to search for evidence. Police and staff also searched Oak Hills to ensure that it was safe. Forest Hills students and staff were directed to go to Oak Hills and remained there all day. Forest Hills was given clearance after police extensively searched the building and did not find any explosive devices. (Letter, February 3rd)

My insides were twisting and my heart ached as I stood outside the school watching the police search the area. I stood shivering until a police officer came over and covered me with his coat. I questioned later why all was quiet for the first thirty minutes and was told that the detectives stay inside and look out with binoculars for the first thirty minutes because usually the perpetrator finds pleasure in watching from a distance.

It was with amazement as I watched our plans unfold. All students were safely dropped at the other school. We activated the phone trees so all parents were contacted. A room was set up to receive parents in order to check out students safely, or to just deliver a child to a parent for a quick, reassuring hug. The day was long and exhausting, but reflecting at the end, I felt assured we had followed through with our thoughtful preparations. It surprised me how calm I was in the heat of the moment, yet exhaustion enveloped me.

That night we held a parent forum and the outcomes of this intensely emotional meeting during the following months included the formation of a safety committee, a reward set up to capture the offender, security guard coverage at night, the installation of security cameras, fencing for school grounds, and a security resource officer assigned to our schools.

My note to my staff following the forum stated,

> The meeting Thursday night went really well. With 150 parents, emotionally sparked, in one room, I was impressed with how productive and proactive the meeting was. You all were given many appreciative remarks and grateful reward from the families. You are wonderful people, and we all recognize this! Never should we have to go through what we've been through these past two

weeks, but you've shown commitment and strength unlike any group I've been with. I thank you, and the parents thank you. (Memo, February 4th)

By years end, my two elementary schools experienced 17 incidents that required police attention ranging from bomb threats to shot out windows to cut phone lines. It was a terrorizing experience that brought our community and staff closer together. However, responses to experiences following this year were directly impacted by the emotional toll we all had lived through.

September 11th brought every person's emotional stresses and life experiences directly to the surface. If you ask anyone today where they were on 9/11, they could probably tell you in detail. I recall turning on the television in the morning to check the weather before leaving for work.

> Across every station screamed disaster, terrorism. Watching in horror, I saw the first tower come crashing down. The dust that moved through the streets was unbelievable. My three girls watched with eyes wide opened as I tried to explain what was going on and reassure their safety. As I listened, the Pentagon was attacked and rumors of a downed plane in New Jersey. I ran upstairs to wake my husband. He rolled over and all I could say was, 'Oh My God…watch'! (Journal, September 11th)

As I arrived at my schools, staff was circled around televisions, some in tears. They all turned to me, questioning what to do when the kids arrived? I called a quick staff meeting and shared routine and reassurance would be our best source of comfort for our students and us. No televisions were to be turned on in classrooms, but we would have one stationed in the staff rooms for adults.

> Many parents stayed close by today. One in particular, Stacy, I had volunteer in her child's classroom because her sister was a firefighter in New York City. She was pale with worry. She needed to be close to her own daughter and kept busy. (Journal, September 11th)

At the end of the school day as I prepared to leave, I recall having a heavy

heart.

> How could our nation be under attack? How do we reassure our children that we are safe, when all travel is halted, adults are panicked. Almost everyone I spoke with today knows a connection with someone in the World Trade center or Pentagon or military. I walked into the 3rd grade classroom. Maggie's son was in the Navy. She grabbed me in a hug and cried, 'He's shipping out. I'm sure of it.' The fear was evident in her eyes as I spoke with her. I took over her class for a while and instruction continued. (Journal, September 11th)

More safety issues continued through the fall.

> Today, Tammy, an assistant for Oak Hills, came into the office with an empty syringe. No needle. She told me about Nathan out at recess filling it with puddle water and showing it secretively to others. When confronted, he claimed he got it from home where his mom uses it to measure things. I called Nathan's mom at work. I explained what happened and she was horrified. She stated that she has no syringes at home and can't imagine where he got it. Sensing her fear, and having questions of my own, I called Nathan down to the office and put him on the phone with mom. I could only hear one side of the story, but Nathan was explaining how he found it at the school. (Journal, November 5th)

I feared for our children. After making a sweep of our playground area, I

communicated with teachers to please review safety precautions with their students

when locating needles or other unknown objects outside.

> Three days later I reflected,

> Monday morning…cell phone rings as I travel to the district office. It's Evelyn. She told me that Darcy was absent and Tanya tried to call my cell. Didn't go through. Darn cell phone… Oak Hills was vandalized over the weekend! Tanya discovered our newly installed camera out front hanging by the cord with two huge rocks underneath. My office window was also broken. An attempted, but botched burglary. Apparently, someone had knocked the camera down with rocks and tried to break into my office. I said I'd be there in five minutes. I called Sean, our detective that worked with us all last year. He was on his way. I called and made a report to the physical plant too so we could get the window replaced. (Journal, November 8th)

I arrived at Oak Hills and immediately saw the camera dangling. There was no major damage to the camera, only little dings from the rocks. As I went into the front office, the monitor showed the upside down posts out front, so the camera was still functioning. Sure enough, my office window was shattered. I figured a B.B. gun had done the damage by the two round holes in the window, but the detective thought only a large impact of a fist or rock.

From experience, I called Forest Hills and asked Evelyn to conduct a walk-around. I grabbed my cell phone and keys and started a walk around Oak Hills. I started out front and examined the grounds, windows, doors and walkways for any damage or evidence. Walking around the building I thought that this was all too familiar! I was surprisingly at ease, not the adrenaline rush from last year's events. I must have been getting numb to these acts. I found this sad and tried to complete my walk around before the students arrived. Everything looked safe, so I went inside just as the detective arrived. He dusted for fingerprints, but only found nose prints where someone was trying to see inside my office. Must have used gloves. He also removed the videotape. We had three cameras hooked up to the recorder. His hope was that we got a clear picture of the intruder. It would take awhile to make a copy of the tape so that he could put it into slow motion and pause.

Sean left and I e-mailed the district office to let them know what happened. I attended to my other e-mail and then walked through classrooms. The students were busy working, silently reading and finishing projects. Organized learning was happening throughout the school. I returned to receive a call from Sean and he

requested that I send a letter home to parents. He knew the suspect entered the grounds

between 4:30-4:45 a.m. I drafted a letter that included this information. I also put in

other information so that I didn't unnecessarily alarm parents.

Sean came back later to fix the camera. I located another broken window. I

missed that one corner of the building on my walk around as I turned into the

courtyard. This window had prints on it. I'd have the custodian put some cardboard

over the broken glass until we replaced the window.

> So much of my day today was attending to the reports and managing from the
> vandalism. It frustrates me that someone would act in this way towards a
> school. Do they not realize the fear they bring to staff, students and parents? I
> then become a manager of fear and feelings.
> Two young men are outside shooting hoops. It's 5:15 p.m. I can't help
> questioning…did they do this? (Journal, November 8th)

Relationship building during the year was powerful in helping the healing

process from the many disruptive attacks to our buildings. Part of the sheriff

department's response was to assign the schools with a Security Resource Officer.

Corporal Roy became our friend and ally for the next few years. When Roy first came

to me in uniform, he was visibly nervous and anxious to be working in an elementary

school. My tactic was to fully integrate Roy into what school was all about. We started

with having him spend time in each classroom, reading to the students, giving spelling

tests, tutoring struggling math students. Roy soon became a permanent fixture in our

schools.

A local newspaper reported that Roy's "main role is to provide a 'presence to

keep the peace,' a presence that gives students and staff a sense of safety" (Herald,

February 15th). His primary purpose was the safety and security of our children, but most surprising, he became a great friend to the staff and parent community and support for our students. Roy was with our staff after each weekend vandalism incident. He followed up with at-risk children, he comforted staff when children were removed from abusive families, he counseled families involved with drugs, and he cried for our tragedy at the end of the year. Roy became our confidant and an integral part of our staff.

"Program aims to improve emergency response"(Herald, March 8th). As a result of the criminal activity from the past year, the county sheriff's department not only provided Officer Roy as a Security Resource Officer, but also received a grant providing resources to electronically map individual schools and store the data on discs to be used in case of emergency. If a school experienced a threat or lock-down event or fire, the police and fire departments would have access to the exact location of all rooms, exits, windows and hallways. I spent an entire weekend following the coordinators as they digitally documented each classroom and hallway. This included an aerial view from the ladder truck of the school grounds. So much attention from law enforcement, county officials and emergency response teams for two tiny, rural elementary schools!

Reflection.

I was shocked by the experiences that faced me as administrator regarding the safety and security of not only the building, but the staff, students and parents. Through these remarkable events, I found myself struggling to find support from

others who had experienced similar events. At times I wanted to crawl into a quiet space and not have to face anybody. The questions, the need for reassurance, the frantic, emotional strain that impacted my staff, as well as parents, were something for which I wasn't prepared. These were events that created imbalance, a sense of distress as described by Bridges (1980). The difficulties in understanding and managing these events were compounded by the fact they were out of our control and not part of a larger goal.

Fullan (1991) also discussed how change could impact staff negatively when there is no relevance, resources, or readiness to prepare for the change. Proactive leadership can pave the way to positive change, but dealing with sudden circumstances that staff is not emotionally prepared to deal with, can create more stress and stagnation than good.

This is where my relationship strengths proved to be important. Of course I utilized the current school and district procedures and depended on communication vehicles to get accurate information out to the community, but it was the listening ear, the calm reassuring voice, the visibility of my presence in the classrooms and hallways that impacted staff and community the most. We were experiencing fear, anger and vulnerability together. I joined my community in collaborating, problem solving and working on a response that would help us heal and take a positive stand. Just as Jaworski (1996) discussed, to increase leadership capacity, leaders must build trust, realize connectedness with others, use flexibility, and rely on inner resources and intuition.

Primary focus on learning and maximizing learning.

A sustained focus on learning and the capacity for engaging others in the fundamental focus on learning is critical in determining a school's academic success. Along with the focus on learning, equally important is the maximizing of learning time in schools. Identifying and reinforcing learning is a primary goal for a school. Avoiding interruptions throughout the school day and sharing a belief in a continuous effort to improve the instructional program are all efforts to increase learning for effective schools (Cotton, 2000).

Eight percent, or 465 total minutes, during the two-week collection of data were spent on the area of maximizing learning time, while seven percent, or 435 minutes, was spent on learning as a primary focus (Tables One and Two). Assemblies, classroom presentations, goal setting, and our continuous improvement model were areas of focus. All but two journal entries throughout the year were building related, with entries about presentations to the school board being district related.

At the beginning of each year, and periodically throughout, I found it important to remind staff of our strengths and celebrate our successes toward student progress and achievement. We were learning to celebrate even the minute signs of growth. In order to measure growth, we set school improvement goals through our Site Council. Forest Hills and Oak Hills' Site Council met once a month for an afternoon. The committee consisted of three teachers, two secretaries, three parents, one community member and me. Our directive from the state mandate was to focus on

analyzing student achievement data, creating and supporting a school improvement plan.

During our first meeting of the year, September 12th, we met in the Oak Hills library at 12:30 p.m. Since serving on Site Council was a two-year commitment, we were only welcoming two new parent members. Last spring they attended our last meeting and we were able to prepare them with most of the general information needed. Today, we would reflect on last year's accomplishments and set new priorities. First of all, we established that our mission statement would remain:

The Site Council exists to increase student achievement by improving instructional programs for students and staff, promoting character development, and applying for and managing grants, thereby creating a healthy, functioning school community. We will accomplish this by interpreting assessment data, developing a school improvement plan, and communicating to our stakeholders. We will act within the guidelines for 21st Century Schools, as budget, time and resources permit.

Our three school goals centered on mathematics, reading, and promoting a safe school culture. The first agenda item after establishing our mission statement was to analyze our student assessment scores from last spring. The state reported back to the schools, determining the percentage of students meeting, not meeting or exceeding state standards at grade levels 3, 5, 8, and 10 in the areas of writing, mathematics, and reading.

We had much to celebrate! Ninety-seven percent of our third graders met or exceeded the reading and literature benchmark. This was up from eighty-six percent

the previous year. Ninety-three percent of our fifth graders met or exceeded the reading and literature benchmark. This was up from eighty-seven percent the previous year and up from ninety percent when these same students were third graders. Our focus on a cohort of the same students from third grade to fifth grade was more powerful data for our team. We felt we were then comparing the same students, as they got older, as opposed to comparing different sets of students. With this in mind, our reading and literature students from third grade to fifth grade actually increased by three percent the number meeting and exceeding the benchmark. The trend from third to fifth grade statewide was to decrease the number meeting or exceeding benchmark in reading and math.

In mathematics, eighty-nine percent of our third graders met or exceeded the benchmark, which was up from eighty-five percent the previous year. Ninety-one percent of our fifth graders met or exceeded the mathematics benchmark. This was up from seventy-six percent the previous year, and up from seventy-nine percent when these students were third graders. The school-wide goal focus in the area of mathematics, articulation and alignment of curriculum and new materials, we felt, contributed greatly to the twelve percent increase in students meeting and exceeding this benchmark between third and fifth grades.

Finally, eighty-five percent of our fifth graders met or exceeded the mathematics problem solving assessment. This was up from seventy-five percent the previous year and up from fifty percent two years prior.

These data showed incredible progress for our students and reinforced the focus of learning and setting goals in these critical areas. The parents proclaimed, "Please send the message to all the staff, teachers, classified assistants, custodians, that we thank them for their commitment to excellence. Our students are learning and thriving!" Plans were made to share this information with the staff, students, and parents through assemblies and newsletters.

> In December, we held a character education assembly at Oak Hills.
> The students were assembled and our fifth grade class marched in proudly with letters spelling respect and responsibility. Each individual in the class held up a letter and read a statement of character that displayed respect or responsibility. Tory, followed by fellow classmates, started the assembly off by holding up her sign and yelling, 'R stands for reaching out to the kid on the playground alone, asking them to join you in a game. E stands for energy in doing your best in class. S stands for standing strong for what you believe to be right. P stands for patience when something new is learned. It will become easier. E stands for everybody is important at Oak Hills. C stands for creativity. Be creative in your thinking and on your projects. T stands for teachers. Love them and learn from them. RESPECT. Respect yourself enough to always do your best! (Journal, December 7th)

We ended the assembly after singing a few songs and reciting our Oak Hills chant. We all pounded the floor three times, slapped our knees three times and clapped our hands three times. This was repeated three times, getting louder and louder and ended with a cheer of 'We Are Awesome!' The power of all those children focusing on doing their best, cheering each other on was exhilarating. Every month we had a character assembly focused on learning, character traits and leadership. These were student-led and very inspirational.

March 4th was a great celebration for our district and individual students. It was an opportunity for our school board to recognize third and fifth grade students

who achieved the highest academic standards on state assessments and also the most

academically improved student in these grade levels. The selected students were

invited to attend the board meeting and to bring their families and friends.

> The boardroom was jammed packed with parents, grandparents, friends, and siblings of these very proud children. I arrived early and stood in the back of the room with my other principal colleagues from other schools. I greeted my six third and fifth grade students. They were visibly nervous, some cleaner and dressed nicer than I've ever seen them, and all excited. Parents donned cameras and camcorders, ready to capture this memorable moment. (Journal, March 4th)

The school board chair welcomed parents, relatives, friends and students. The

meeting proceeded with the announcement and presentation of certificates of award to

each student and then pictures were taken. Our PTA president was present and handed

each student an envelope containing a congratulations card and an ice cream

certificate. The intent was for the families to go out and celebrate after the awards

ceremony.

Recognition of progress, learning and improvement was vital to our schools

and district.

> Before leaving that night, with appreciation, I thanked each school board member for providing this opportunity for our students as a pat on the back. I shared how important it is for the kids to reap the rewards of their efforts. (Journal, March 4th)

Reflection.

If I were to choose one area I honestly felt where I could spend more time, it

would be acting in an instructional leader mode. That is truly where I can most impact

student achievement progress. However, as I reflect on my year, I found so many other issues and situations that monopolized my time.

As Cotton (2000) suggested, the ability to focus and energize a group toward common goals and a vision can prepare a learning environment that provides success for students. Coming to the realization that this single focus is impossible, I maintain that a combination of all the effective practices discussed in my dissertation contribute in concert towards student success. However, the common goal must remain at the front or the path can become less clear.

Senge et al. (2000) described this common goal as shared vision. Although I should strive to honor each individual's differences and unique gifts, I found it vital that we became cohesive as a unit, focusing and supporting a common vision that was shared by all. The concept of team learning (Senge et al., 2000) is an effective way to encourage growth in this area, dialogue being a critical component of team learning.

One way I encouraged dialogue between my staff members was by providing time and structure. Dialogue should be free flowing, yet structured enough to help initiate conversation around essential topics (Senge et al., 2000). Before a meeting, I would ask for input about critical issues affecting our work. Then I created a variety of open-ended questions to initiate conversations. Realizing that each question would most likely take on a life of its own, the staff knew there was freedom to veer off the initial question. Of course, trust was crucial to this activity, as well as the suspension of assumptions that provided a chance to explore personal opinions from different angles.

All voices needed a chance to be heard and there were a variety of ways to ensure this happened.

One way was to appoint a facilitator who could sustain the dialogue and encourage the conversation beyond habitual patterns. With students, you can pass the "talking stick" and only the person holding the stick gets to talk. When used with adults, I have found this can stifle the flow of dialogue when a person can't respond to a comment freely.

Another way I have found helpful in supporting team learning is by introducing the action research process. As an educator, I have always been aware of research and considered myself a researcher. However, it was not until I began my position in administration that I began to link research with effective teaching and assessment practices. Action research is the process of studying a real school situation with a view to improve the quality of actions and results within it. Also aiming to improve one's own professional judgment and to give insight into how better to achieve desirable educational goals. Ultimately, action research is a means for changing from current practice toward better practice (Schmuck, 1997).

My position focused on providing support for teachers and with the implementation of the content standards and performance assessment, they had been in a state of disillusionment, with many confused and tired. Transitions are a natural part of life and teaching, but the extreme demands on our educators at the state and district levels are creating an environment that is crying out for simplicity and focus.

The role of action research in the classroom had been the discussion of many school districts, colleges, and universities and in my own personal case, administrator responsible for the design of staff development. With the spiraling change cycle toward stricter standards with fewer resources available, teachers were feeling the uncertainty that occurs with change (Harris and Drake, 1997).

The action research cycle provided teachers with peer support and a research process that was focused and simple. By analyzing data and making statements that led to the creation of an action plan, teachers were provided with a structure where they documented results, shared dialogue with others, and ideally made better educated decisions for their students' needs; the obvious goal being increased student achievement.

Instructional leadership is an area that requires more process and systematic thinking to grow as an individual leader. In reflecting, I hoped this would be an area of strength, yet I realize to make a definite impact on learning, I have so far to go.

Parent and community involvement.

Even though the schools have limited control over how much a parent is involved in their child's learning, research shows that parent involvement can make a positive difference in student performance (Cotton, 2000). Validated practices for working with and engaging parent and community members within the school environment include conducting outreach activities, developing written policies stressing the importance of parental involvement, making special efforts to include

underrepresented parents, communicating repeatedly the importance of parental involvement, and providing parent education (Cotton, 2000).

Five percent, or 315 minutes, of my two-week time study was spent focusing on parent and community involvement (Tables One and Two). Two-thirds of my journal entries, related to this theme, dealt directly with individual parents or school families, while one-third were community related. Activities such as volunteering, communication, pre-kindergarten involvement, cultural diversity, and sharing student achievement information were categories used in my data collection.

"Parents are our partners," read the heading in our school brochure. With the public schools struggling with a lack of adequate funding, we naturally competed with private schools. Brochures were created to not only inform parents of what Oak Hills and Forest Hills have to offer, but to encourage a positive communication link with our families. Under what our school is proud to offer, we listed community involvement, including participation in classroom and special events, a business partnership program and a foster grandparent program. Also included in the brochure was the description of the Parent Teacher Club promoting school activities and raising funds for field trips, education technology, playground equipment, and security.

I met Grandma Lynn and Grandpa Rex in early September. After receiving a call from the local Foster Grandparent organization, I agreed to meet with this elderly couple to discuss how we could use their volunteer skills in our schools. Lynn had been a classroom teacher years before and Rex was her second husband. She was vibrant, full of life and eager to work with children again. She shared that she had

published a book about the Oregon Trail and would love to share it with the students. Rex was much quieter and had a significant hearing loss. He was excited to work with the children, but admittedly nervous.

After our meeting, I arranged to have Lynn and Rex join our Forest Hills staff twice a week and we agreed to provide lunch. I spoke with teachers and shared the strengths I believed them to have and we decided to place Lynn with the kindergartners in the morning and Rex with first graders. Lynn would then have time in the afternoon to share her social studies love with our older students at Oak Hills.

Thursday morning, the last week of September, Rex and Lynn showed up at the school earlier than expected, dressed in their best clothing and smiling from ear to ear. I greeted them warmly and took them up and down the hallways to introduce them to our teachers. Once our rounds were made, I dropped off Lynn at the kindergarten room with Karen and took Rex down to the first grade room with Lisa. It took no time at all for our children and staff to fall in love with our adopted grandparents! As I would peek my head into the classrooms, I would see Lynn with a five-year old snuggled on her lap while she read stories. Rex had a special chair where students would come to him and he would help them with their work. Fondly named Grandma Lynn and Grandpa Rex, our school was warmed by the gentle love these two poured into our children and staff. Tuesdays and Thursdays soon turned into three days per week, and then five.

By November, the bond had grown even stronger. Forest Hills had become a second family to Rex and Lynn and our school had adopted them as an integral part of our learning environment.

> As I walked into the kindergarten room, Lynn crouched down beside a robust five-year old. I joined them and Lynn smiled and said, "I'm in paradise!" She turned back to the child and continued her conversation with Shannon. Shannon was an extremely quiet child who was looking into Lynn's eyes with intent. Lynn asked about her train trip she and her sister and mom were about to embark on. Shannon answered in almost a whisper to the questions Lynn asked, but the twinkle in her eye told me her excitement was ready to burst. Lynn was able to engage a normally shy and reserved child into a safe dialogue. (Journal, November 7th)

It was the week prior to Thanksgiving when I received a call from Pete, the director of the Foster Grandparent Program. Lynn had passed away from a heart attack the night before. I was crushed. Lynn had blown fresh life into our school with her energy and spirit. My worries turned to Rex. He had no family close by and Lynn was his soul mate. I inquired from Pete how we could help and he assured us he would let us know. After sharing the news with the staff, we came up with a plan to share the news with the students. There would be some sadness, so we wanted to allow for the expression of their emotions. Our focus was on how to share our thoughts with Rex. Cards and pictures were created by every student in the school and delivered to Rex, encouraging him to return to us as soon as possible. I planned to follow up with Rex within a few weeks to help ease him back to our school. I was afraid his gentle and shy nature would prevent him from returning without Lynn.

It wasn't until January when Rex finally did come back to Forest Hills. He shared with me that he had been so very sad with the loss of Lynn he wasn't ready to

return. However, he truly missed the kids and was ready to come back. We worked out

his schedule and got him back with children as soon as possible. As the week went on,

we saw a transformation come over Rex. He was smiling, hugging children and

teachers and the color in his face was pink, not pale. The following week was Rex's

birthday. The staff had made plans!

> I led Rex into the staff room while he questioned me. "I must get down to the
> first grade room. They are waiting for me," he proclaimed. As he entered the
> staffroom, the teachers all yelled, "Happy Birthday, Rex!" He crumpled into
> the nearest chair and tears flowed freely from his eyes. His smile was priceless
> and he motioned each of us over for a hug. After hugs, he blew out his candles
> on his cake and opened up his brand new flannel shirt from the staff. He could
> barely speak, but softly said, "Thank you so very much. You are the only
> family I have now." (Journal, January 8th)

September 11th created a remarkable phenomenon unlike our schools had

experienced before. The solemnity and connectedness was unique and one I wanted to

be able to capture and turn into a positive community building experience. Our annual

Open House and Ice Cream Social was scheduled just three days after the tragedy.

Immediately, the nation began canceling major events, unprecedented before in my

lifetime. Our school parents began calling me to ask the same, should we cancel? How

can we celebrate while our nation is in crisis? Others were convinced that our

community needed to come together as a family in honor of those who lost their lives.

Much discussion occurred between staff and the district and the families. It was finally

agreed that we must continue with our plans, but focus our energy in a positive tribute

to the 9/11 victims and families.

Planning was taken over by an overzealous group of parents; the ice cream

social was quickly transforming into a candlelight vigil. As school administrator, I

needed to lead in a direction that would satisfy the need for our community to

experience a special ceremony, while keeping a balance and respect for all walks of

life. I felt I must keep the ceremony simple, safe and appropriate for a school function.

The first step was to obtain clearance from the city fire marshal to have candles lit on

campus with children present. The next step was to touch base with a trusted parent

who happened to be a Greek Orthodox Priest. I knew if I took control of the choice of

speaker, I could direct and guide the message.

Nick was my choice. Nick was a gentle, caring father of five children. He and

his wife had recently brought back three of their five children and entered them into

the school after home schooling. It was with great faith and trust that they released

their children into our care and we had since developed a strong relationship. After

speaking with Nick, he was eager to speak to our families as a tribute to the victims of

9/11 and with the message of care and empowerment to make a difference and to

preserve strong families and communities.

That night, the skies were clear and a warm breeze blew through the school

courtyard. I wrote:

> Religion may not have been present in a public school tonight, but spirituality
> was shared by a group of children, families, teachers, and other guests gathered
> with a common purpose. As the darkness enveloped us, we gathered together
> on the blacktop, under the outdoor basketball hoops. Nick played soft music on
> his guitar while one candle lit the first in a line of many. One by one, adults lit
> each other's candles and faces glowed with the warmth of the flame. Children
> stood by eager and anxious to share in the mystery. Nick's calm voice carried

over the silence as he spoke of promise, of faith, of hope. He challenged us to embrace our community and to lean on one another. After he spoke the crowd was hushed in silence for the memory of the 9/11 victims. Powerful is not even a word close in describing the effect. Eyes were glistening with tears as candles were blown out and families embraced one another. Our bond that night would carry us throughout the year and beyond. (Journal, September 15th)

Creating a sense of pride and community within our schools had been a priority for our staff and parents, but taking that beyond our school walls and outside our classrooms was a vision we agreed was equally important. After the events of September 11th, one teacher in particular found a passion in organizing a community event of celebration of our heroes. Janet shared her ideas with the staff during a morning staff meeting two weeks after the tragic events of 9/11. She felt it was important for our students to be able to do something positive for our community and show respect and patriotism for our country. The other teachers shared her enthusiasm and one of the greatest events blossomed from one small idea.

By November 6th, all Forest Hills students had created red, white and blue banners, hats, and flags. They sent out invitations to the mayor, city officials, district leaders, and most importantly, all fire and police employees. The goal was to pay tribute to the area police and fire fighters through a patriotic parade and presentation. A local newspaper reported:

> About 145 Forest Hills students lined up behind a red, white and blue banner Tuesday morning at the mall to march, honoring area police and firefighters. Children wanted to honor workers who keep our community safe. "We wanted to say how important they are, that they are our role models, and they represent people with character," shared teacher Janet Cross.
>   Once outside, the children waved flags and sang songs, including "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy," "You're a Grand Old Flag," and "We Love Our

Beautiful Flag." Surrounding the children were the emergency workers, onlookers and relatives snapping photographs.

Toward the end of the tribute that took about a month to prepare, the children went through each letter of the alphabet and then recited a corresponding phrase that honored the work of police and firefighters. Students presented each agency with a framed copy of the alphabet tribute. (Herald, November 6th)

This was truly a bonding event for students, school staff, parents, and community leaders. The assembly of so many from different walks of life, coming together for the common purpose of recognition and appreciation was empowering. In their simple way, children paid tribute to our local agencies, drawing closer the people that rush through life day in and day out. For one short moment, time was still as adults heard gratitude from our future, our youngest citizens.

Obviously in the schools, not all parent contacts are positive ones and some quite irrational at best. Susan, a fifth grade student, was caught walking out of our book fair with an unpaid book tucked under her jacket. When confronted by a staff member, she denied taking the book and became very upset and defensive. I asked the student and the student's teacher to join me in my office. When dealing with children with highly fragile emotions, I tend to provide a calm, comfortable environment. Keeping due process in mind, I allowed Susan to explain what had happened. Her story denied the taking of the book; that it was an accident and she had left her money somewhere else. We discussed all of the options of saving the book, or putting it on hold until she could pay for it, but my intent was to bring the parents in to continue the conversation.

Susan was Native American and her parents had a history of discontent from their perception that the public school system treated their child unjustly. I received a phone call early the next morning. Susan's mother was furious and demanded an appointment immediately. She was threatening to take me to the board of discrimination and to sue the school district.

> When she arrived at school, it was obvious from her demeanor that she was ready to attack from the highest emotional level possible. She entered my office and sat down glaring at me. "You'd better worry if I were you Ms. Prince, because I will take you to the board. No one treats me or my child like you did!" She was taking this situation as a direct personal attack. I deal with threats as calmly as I can. I have found that it doesn't pay to display anger. I sat back and asked if she would like to begin sharing her concerns. She blurted back for me to explain myself. So I relayed the entire event from the previous day and got clarifying support from both the teacher and Susan. When interrupted with claims of discrimination or blaming Susan unduly, I turned quietly to Susan to get verification from her that she was treated unfairly. This of course put the child in an uneasy position because the two adults that treated her justly the day before were sitting in front of her, while her mom made angry accusations. She didn't have much to say at all. (Journal, November 13)

I didn't resolve much that morning with Susan's mom. The next day she did try to make a formal complaint at a higher level, but there were no grounds that her child was treated poorly. In fact, it was found that her child was treated with the utmost respect and care, while modeling important character development lessons.

I was touched on a daily basis with the care and emotion parents brought forward when it came to their children. The appreciation letters and gifts, the hugs and words of praise all felt reinforcing for all the time and energy I spent on creating a safe and learning environment. However, no letter or word of praise could compare with the single, most powerful gift I have ever received from a family.

The Lester family struggled. They struggled financially. They struggled emotionally. They struggled physically. The Lester parents were nearly children themselves, heavily into drug and alcohol use and living in filth. The oldest boy was in first grade and successfully made it to school daily, although in torn and dirty clothes and unfed. When he came to school, he left at home two brothers, a toddler and an infant.

I worked diligently with this family to provide community resources to help with employment, groceries, heat, and clothing. However, the root of the problem was not easily remedied and slowly the drug abuse took the health and safety away from the children. Children Services intervened one day when they discovered the source of the Lester's heat was a barbecue in the middle of the living room. The boys were removed from the home and the long journey to recovery began. The parents sought my help, not realizing I was one of the main reasons the boys had been removed from them. I met regularly with the family and the network set up by Children Services. We were able to keep the oldest in school with us, which was critical for his academic and emotional stability.

The week before school let out for winter break, I heard a knock on my office door. Darcy popped her head in and said that Mrs. Lester was outside wanting to speak with me. I asked her in and she closed the door behind her.

> Jenna's eyes were dark and wet with tears. She grabbed me into a hug and started to cry harder. Her body was shaking. Jenna said through sobs, "I want you to have this." Reaching inside her pocket, she brought out what seemed to be the most important possession she owned. Into my hand she placed a snapshot of her and her husband holding the three boys. She explained that

they had just taken the picture at the Children Services during their visitation that day. It was very special to her, but she felt strongly that she wanted me to have it as a gift. It was her family's way of saying thank you. I assured her I would always keep it close to me and thanked her. It was probably the only picture they owned of their family. (Journal, December 15th)

When Jenna left, I immediately placed the picture above my desk where I would be reminded of the silent struggles and innocent devotion this family shared with me. To this day, I still pull out the snapshot and wonder what is in store for these little boys.

When schools prepare for community and parent involvement, volunteering, open houses, carnivals, fundraisers, and parent/teacher conferences commonly come to mind. There was absolutely nothing in my college education or professional experience that prepared me for what happened one seemingly uneventful day, April 18th. I was cruising through my primary classrooms that morning as the students settled into their typical routine. Evelyn called me down to the office.

Officer Roy was on the phone for me. I answered and he explained he was at the scene of a car accident and wanted to know if any of our families owned a blue sports car. No one came to mind, until I turned to Evelyn and asked her. Evelyn's face paled as she nodded her head. "A kindergartner's mother drives a car like that. That is Kara's car."

Without thinking, I put the phone down and raced down the hall to see if Kara was in class. She had not arrived. Running down the hall now, I grabbed the phone. Roy was still waiting on the other end. He shared, as I sat down in shock, that a mother and young girl were found in the car, upside down in the river. The mother

was taken to the hospital where she clung to life for a short time, but the little girl was found too late. I asked him with crazed concern if Kara's preschool sister had been in the car. This, of course, came as a surprise to Roy and he yelled at his other officers to try to locate the four year old. They had been unsuccessful in contacting the father by phone.

> What do I do, I asked myself as I hung up the phone? I was due to meet with the bargaining team in an hour. Evelyn and I were the only ones who knew of the accident. For the time being, I wanted to keep it that way. School was proceeding and my mind was going numb. I fought back my tears and frantically called the district office. I shared the news and they talked strategies with me. I couldn't hear. Buzzing grew louder and louder in my ears. I closed my eyes. (Journal, April 18th)

Scott, my principal colleague, came over to offer support. He and I sat down and created a list of important things to do. Our tasks included who to tell and when. A letter would need to be written to go home with students, we would need to provide counseling support for school the next day, and we wrote strategies on how to deal with the media. While we were creating the list, Officer Roy came to the school. He was visibly shaken and emotionally strained. Kara was one of our kindergarten darlings that he knew well from visiting classrooms. He shared that they located the little sister at her preschool, safe and sound. The father had still not been contacted. As we were talking, a television crew appeared on campus and started walking up the pathway to the front door hauling cameras. I turned to Officer Roy and he understood. He blocked the front entrance and demanded they leave. He disclosed that the staff and students of the school were not aware of the accident yet. They respected his demands and left campus.

The excruciating part of the morning was waiting. We could not release any information, even to staff, until the father had been located and told. In the meantime, Evelyn, Roy and I quietly planned for the inevitable sharing of tragic news.

Kara's regular teacher was out ill this day, so it was important for me to reach her in person before she heard the news from somewhere else. The day dragged on and the clearance to share the news came around 3:00 p.m. The father had been reached in another city while on business. The media would now release names of the victims. It was important for me to act quickly and provide factual information to my staff and community.

With the students gone for the day, I gathered my staff together. I shared the sad news and we cried together. We designed our plans for the following day, requesting support from each other and for the children. Officer Roy was present, along with Ty, the county chaplain. They shared plans to set up a safe room for parents in the library. Someone else suggested a table out front for pictures and flowers. Ideas were flowing. I promised to be in every room when needed to provide teachers with a break. Support would be coming from other school counselors spending the day in our school.

Knowing I had a hard job ahead, I left my staff and entered my office. Closing the door behind me, I picked up the phone to personally call all thirty-six-kindergarten families.

> I have some very, very sad news to share with you. Today, we lost one of our kindergartners in a tragic car accident. Kara was killed with her mother this morning. We will have school tomorrow, but will have many adults here to

support your child. Please share this information with your child the best way you know how and hug and love them for security. (Journal, April 18th)

And so I shared this information thirty-six times. I stopped in between calls and would lay my head on my desk and sob. Wiping my eyes, I would proceed. I heard from our district personnel director twice during the evening checking in on me, knowing what a difficult task I was completing. I called my husband once to just hear his voice while tears flowed. I had never experienced such emotional strain and exhaustion as I did while making those phone calls.

My last call completed, I packed up my bag ready to go. The hallways were dark by now, silence filled the classrooms. As I drove towards the kindergarten teacher's house, I stopped at a local store and purchased a furry teddy bear and a dozen yellow roses. These would be placed in Kara's honor on the front table in the morning.

Karen, a friend and colleague of Donna's met me at her house. We knocked on Donna's door. She opened the door anxiously. Not knowing what news we had to share, but realizing it couldn't be good because I told her I was coming over in person to share something. She looked in my face and tears filled her eyes. "It's about one of my kids, isn't it?" We had Donna sit down. She was surprisingly brave and insisted on being present tomorrow to be with her class. I left Donna in Karen's care as I set out for home. It was 10:30 p.m. I didn't sleep much that night.

The outpouring of support was amazing the next day. Families arrived and while children received care in classrooms, parents gathered in the library. Staff from

across the district came to support teachers and students. Officer Roy and I went into classrooms to share with the students about the tragedy and it was difficult, but surprisingly calming until we entered the kindergarten room. I was caught off guard and moved to the back of the room shaken and in tears. I was unable to share the news with these innocent and trusting five-year olds. Most already had been told by their parents the night before and were so beautiful in their processing. One little boy pointed to her desk and asked if it could just stay there for a while. Another pointed to the pictures on the wall and located Kara's big, bright red tulip she had painted. "She loved tulips!" he proclaimed.

By weeks end, the front table was overflowing with flowers, stuffed animals and pictures drawn by Kara's friends. It was a lovely tribute. School continued and students and staff functioned, but closure was missing. Kara's father was very angry and wanted nothing to do with a service. The more I spoke with the chaplain, the more we agreed a community event would be incredibly healing and necessary for the school and the family. We began planning together and the father soon joined in.

Our school and parents held a Celebration of Life ceremony in memory of Kara and her mother on April 29th. The flier was adorned with tulips and a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson, "After the sun is down, and the west faded, the heavens begin to fill with stars." Forest Hills families brought in balloons for the chairs, flowers for the stage and purchased two beautiful blossoming trees as gifts for the family. Over two hundred people came to the celebration, with the most honored guests in the front, Kara's father and little sister Kelly. I shared:

When I reflect on the short time I knew Kara, I feel the warmth of her smile and the energy of her hugs. Kara could not travel down the halls without hopping out of line to give me a great big hug. She was a shining star at Forest Hills. So full of energy, such a sparkle. Kelly, when you are remembering your special sister, look into the stars at night. And perhaps they are not stars in the sky at all. Perhaps the stars are openings in the heaven where the love of our lost ones pour through and shines upon us to let us know they are happy. (Memorial speech, April 29th)

Songs were song by one of our teachers, memories shared by family, staff and friends and Kara's classmates sang their favorite songs. The celebration was full of life. Happy memories, wonderful stories, tears of sadness, and an exchange of gifts were shared. Warmth and connectedness was shared and a bond tightened between adults and children. For a moment in time, the spirit of life and its fragility was respected and honored. Closure and sweet good-byes were completed that afternoon.

Reflection.

The irony of my findings in this section was that only 5% of my two-week log showed specific parent and community outreach and contact. However, in my journaling, the most powerful impacts on my leadership, corresponding with building relationships with parents and the community, occurred in this area. I found my emotional bond to my school families and community to be strengthened through events that were out of my control. Our reactions to tragedies and how we dealt with each one as a staff made a difference in how our parents and students responded.

As a leader, I found times where I felt weak emotionally, yet my staff and parents looked to me for strength. During the tragedy of the death of our student, I was shocked at how dependent my teachers and parents became on my leadership and

guidance. My humanness was forgotten by most and even by me at times. I had to be reminded by my support system, those closest to me, to rest, close my door and cry. The loss of a child or the tragic events of 9/11, not to mention the impact on so many violent acts toward the schools, are unusual events in the lifetime of a principal, let alone in one year. Through these crises, I learned to depend on my heart and listen to the needs of those around me.

In my leadership role, I could have chosen to ignore the feeling base behind many events and led with my head, staying fact based. However, as Sergiovanni (1991) points out, leadership is a combination of head, heart and hands. It is through emotion, knowledge, common sense, and action that I was empowered to lead my staff and families through some of my darkest days of leadership.

I discovered that having a sense of closure and expression of emotion was very important to our community. The Lesters offered a simple gift, a candlelight gathering, and a celebration of life for a six-year old child. All were acts of closure and meaningful events. Planning, creating, and standing side by side through major events or even the smallest activity can build bridges between school and home. The connections made in positive ways can make the negatives and challenges much easier to deal with in a manner of trust and patience. It is not just the day-to-day interactions that create the powerful bonds between school and home, but these interactions help create trust and loyalty so when a significant event does happen, relationships built over time strengthen the support of one another.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Using Cotton's thirty years of research identifying categories that are common to effective schools, I was able to sort into a more organized system, the experiences and issues I personally faced as a school leader. Finding this was a convenient way to code and sort my information gathered, I also quickly realized that I was forced to make certain judgments of where to categorize certain issues. I found limitations to using Cotton's framework since the categories displayed an interconnected relationship with one another. Many of the issues I logged could easily have been organized within one or more of Cotton's categories. I made the decision on placing issues into categories based on my interpretations of the most impact the issue carried.

I also discussed each category in my dissertation in the order of the amount of time the two-week log displayed. General administration had the highest percentage of time documented during those two weeks; however, it became very clear early on that the amount of time spent during the two-week study did not correlate with the impact of my experiences through journaling. During my two-week time study, parent and community involvement was the lowest percentage of time spent; however, it played one of the most critical parts in my journaling of the year. The log was helpful in itemizing the everyday tasks a school leader faces, but didn't share the full impact of the experiences gained through a year of relationship building with parents, students, and staff.

This discovery was important to my study in helping me understand the issues I faced and how multi-faceted they were in impacting my schools and my leadership

decisions. An issue as complex as the death of a child cannot simply be categorized under parent and community involvement. This tragedy impacted my general administrative functions, the emotional safety of the environment, and the learning focus of our classrooms. However, my generalization of Kara's death and how it most impacted my leadership and the schools placed it under parent and community involvement.

Cotton claims that her "elements under discussion here have to do primarily with structure and method; and while I contend that they are critical components of educational success, they do not, in and of themselves, guarantee it" (2000, p. 4). Therefore, knowing this is only a general framework for success, I was directly impacted by the extent of relational factors that were not addressed by Cotton. I found the combination of the structural categories I coded my leadership issues into and the power of the personal relationships encountered during the year interrelated and had great impact on my leadership.

Analyzing the many issues I faced in one year, I chose only a few to share. It was difficult to choose. However, for the flow of my work and realizing the impact these specific issues had on me directly, I offered a morsel of what really mattered that year. Upon reflection, I was truly amazed at the depth of experiences and trauma faced by my school community and me. I was not surprised by the many tasks I was responsible for on a daily basis. What surprised me more was the perpetual emotional and caring required in my leadership role.

Chapter 5:

The Journey Concludes, Yet Has Just Begun

Connecting to Women's Ways of Knowing

The purpose of this dissertation was to share my story so that I might impact my own leadership style and also help guide others in educational leadership roles. Feeling prepared with a solid foundation of educational theory behind me, I entered my leadership role with enthusiasm. As I discovered, my theory base and responses were continually challenged or reinforced when faced with ordinary and extraordinary experiences. My discoveries emerged though a combination of theory, perception of myself, and perceptions of others.

To better understand how my leadership skills were impacted by the issues I faced during the year, I returned to the framework of *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al., 1997). I realized how powerful my perceptions were in my study based on my own knowledge base, life experiences, and sense of self.

Belenky et al. (1997) explained how all the theories in our heads are constructed, including our actions, others' perceptions of us, and our perceptions of how others perceive us; thereby forming the way we think, I began to make connections on how issues impacted me as a leader based on how I managed my perceptions and others' perceptions of the situations.

At the beginning of the continuum, *silence* is the most basic level of perception and response (Perry, 1997, as cited in Belenky et al., 1997). Individuals gather

knowledge through concrete experiences and not easily with words. When I reflected on my journey, I found myself beyond this level of knowing. I functioned at a higher level, expressing myself through words, written and oral communication, oftentimes crafting just the right message to share difficult news.

However, I realized I faced parents and children responding at this level. The example of the Lester family where the mother, Jenna, had experienced a lifetime of abuse, poverty, and drug abuse obviously had an impact on me. She functioned at a base level, looking towards authority to determine her destiny; passive and dependent. When she handed me her prize possession, her only picture of the family, I was honored, yet deeply saddened that she was somehow stuck in a place of dependency and fear. She displayed a silence so deep and painful, I wanted to look away for fear that I would somehow be pulled deeply into her heart and unable to return to security and self-worth. Feeling guilty for the judgments I placed on this mother, I was at the same time thankful for the gift of knowing her and hoping I could make a tiny difference in her life.

Oftentimes these are adults that grew up from a childhood lacking in rich dialogue and auditory stimulation. As a principal, I see disadvantaged children at an early age at risk of showing deficiencies in these areas. This can directly impact the learning process of how to read and understand the written language.

Keeping in mind how we construct knowledge, and how important are life experiences and language association to early development, we came up with an intensive intervention plan to immerse the kindergartner, Scott, in language and to

provide learning opportunities to help support his development toward independence. Obviously he would need outside counseling and behavioral support, but as a school administrator, I was able to provide him with additional language experience and an extended day in class twice a week. This impact of how human voice is encouraged or silenced played an important role in both Scott and Jenna Lester's lives.

Received knowledge is the second level that Belenky et al. (1997) discussed. This is the level I found myself teetering between as a younger principal. Functioning within this level of knowledge, adults tend to view others' opinions as fact and also devote themselves to the care of others while remaining "selfless" (Gilligan, 1982).

As I faced the many ordinary tasks required of a principal each and every day, I stayed within a comfortable structure and relied on the systems in place for the organization and management of a school. Unfortunately, there were quite a few crises that occurred during the year. When I reflect on my thoughts and actions during these events, I found I was in a balancing act between *received knowledge* and *subjective knowledge*. It was very difficult for me to not fall into the role of caretaker and nurturer, sacrificing my voice and subjectivity and objectivity in the situation. I forced myself to step back and rely on colleagues to help me manage my own feelings and emotions so I could be rational in decision-making.

When 9/11 happened, the depth of emotions was so powerful all around me; I didn't have time to manage my own feelings. I jumped into a role of caregiver and was surprised at how staff and parents looked to me for guidance and counseling. When I reflect on how exhausted I was during this time, it doesn't surprise me when I see I

was responding at an emotional level, trying to balance my leadership between making objective decisions, listening to my subjective inner voice, and managing the care of those around me. This task was daunting and unrealistic when I reflect.

I also experienced this level of knowing when meeting with our district leadership team. Being the rookie member of the team, with the least amount of experience, I tended to rely on listening and responding based on my more experienced colleagues' opinions. However, as the year progressed, I found myself gaining more confidence and was able to present my own ideas and share thoughts that pushed on those of other administrators. My movement into *subjective* and *procedural knowledge* was evident as I made my presentation to the team regarding my proposal for counseling services. I stepped out into a more objective process presenting the pros and cons of a concept that was new and a stretch for the management for the district. I found this to be a more comfortable level for me to work within. The process, structure, and organization of managing materials and ideas in this format felt smooth and used little emotion.

Understanding this level of knowledge was helpful for me in dealing with new teachers. The constant comparison with others and basing individual decisions on the truths of more experienced teachers was a syndrome that was common with young teachers new to the profession. A situation occurred last year when a young teacher, who was obviously upset and frustrated, approached me. Sherry expressed sincere disappointment and failure when she began comparing herself with the teacher in the classroom next door. Sherry, in her *receptive* stage, had taken everything her colleague

said and modeled as the only acceptable "truth." Therefore, she followed the other teacher's lesson plans, didn't express opinions in meetings, and felt satisfied in her "selfless" acceptance of her teammate's decisions. This was quite comfortable for Sherry for a couple of years. However, I believe Sherry was beginning the transition into the next level of knowing, *subjective knowledge*, or "the inner voice." She was beginning to move away from accepting *received knowledge* as the hard and fast rule. Sherry was beginning to develop a "new conception of truth as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 54).

Movement into a more *subjective* level of knowing is most common throughout the college experience for many young adults. This is the redefinition of authority for some, where knowledge becomes an individual response that is experienced, not necessarily thought out. This is the level where I found myself dealing with the majority of staff and parents throughout my school experience. Most people will find themselves at the subjective level of knowing for the majority of life responses (Belenky et al., 1997).

Many parents I have dealt with in the school environment have demonstrated the highly emotional and personal viewpoint found in the subjective stage. One particular example occurred with Susan, the Native American student who was caught leaving our school's book fair with an unpurchased book tucked under her coat. The anger expressed by Susan's mother presented a block to moving beyond to discuss the critical issue at hand, Susan's predicament.

The difficulty of this situation lay in the fact that Susan's mother was acting out of a high level of subjectivity. Her emotional, inner voice was the only truth she could understand and willingly accept. As a Native American, the cultural significance of a daughter being questioned about taking something that wasn't hers was not only an emotional issue, but also one of family pride. She was unable to objectively hear all of the facts, have a rational discussion with her child and me, and determine that there may be other levels of knowledge involved in this situation.

This made for a difficult path for Susan. She was caught between two cultures as a growing young woman. Susan's challenge will be how to deal with the model of a mother acting from a very subjective frame of reference in knowledge, while trying to understand how she fits into a world with contradictory expectations.

I have struggled with this situation myself, trying to keep beyond my inner voice and present myself as objective, calm, and willing to listen. Knowing the facts and having the impact of Susan caught in the middle of a highly emotionally powered confrontation worried me. I decided on the spot that this was not a battle to win, but a learning situation for me to listen and keep a calm environment for Susan. With the parent unwilling to move from *subjective knowledge*, I couldn't force my ideas or facts onto Susan's mother. This is where I had to resolve that this was one situation that would not advance to resolution. I found this extremely frustrating, but knew I must keep steady and document my experience because I reminded myself this would probably not be the last encounter with this family. I was functioning from a

procedural level of knowing and tried to understand and emphasize from the parent's perspective.

My process of journaling throughout this autoethnographic study has been one of discovering my inner voice in the level of *subjectivity* and *procedural knowledge*. I have been evolving through discovery of my feelings, emotions, and responses to the issues I faced in the year studied. I found it was my intuition and inner voice that helped lead me through some of my more difficult situations. I had not discovered a perfect handbook written on dealing with the stress and emotions from terrorist attacks, the on-going vandalism and threats on a school, or the loss of a five-year old student. So much of my response as a leader came from inside me. The experiences and connections developed with staff and parents led my decisions in many ways. Of course I had to stay objective and follow district policy and procedure, but when it came to comforting staff, or sharing difficult news, or talking with grieving and frightened children and parents, I reacted from instinct and from my heart. The strength I felt astounded me.

As I proceeded to journal and then reflected on my entries, I found myself in the level of *procedural knowing* moving towards *constructed knowing*. This is where I began creating meaning from my thoughts, reflections and actions based on my experiences and the experiences of those around me. While *procedural knowing* takes others' perspectives into consideration, *constructed knowing* involves relationships and the integration of perspectives into a respected, common voice (Belenky et al., 1997).

Caring, in the sense of *connected knowing*, must be carefully nurtured in our children. Recognizing that all people share capacities to care and that these capacities need to be developed is the first step in connecting with the world around us. Nurturing the development of care needs to happen in schools with the understanding that we all learn uniquely. Keeping in mind that our physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development thrives in an environment that recognizes and resembles multiple intelligences, can help stimulate this area of connectedness (Gardner, 1991). As with connected knowing, the ability to look through a different lens from another's perspective begins the journey in understanding that all people have various levels of caring capacities due to factors that may be associated with race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and religion (Noddings, 1992).

I was reminded daily as a principal working with forty different staff members that each is functioning on a different level of knowing at any given time. Many factors came into play making the determination of what level of understanding was being displayed. One of my teachers, Chris, was very data driven. Her decisions were based on empirical data collected from assessments and proven program data. Chris, Laura, and I shared a long conversation one day about ability leveling in the area of reading. Chris's passion and understanding was supported in the area of *procedural knowledge* with a separate lens looking at the objectivity of the data.

In other words, Chris agreed with the data that supported a shift to move students into different reading levels with different teachers. Chris was ready to make

her decisions based on what the data told her. She was looking through a different lens, a lens of objectivity.

Chris's ideas were met with great resistance from Laura. Laura responded from a level of subjectivity. She was very emotional and stated that it was too difficult to share her students, who were with her all day, with another teacher. She struggled in understanding that Chris had supporting evidence to show that her idea was practical and made sense for student achievement.

A situation like this presented a challenge to me as a principal. I needed to help provide an environment that was safe for ideas to be presented, but also an environment that allowed ideas to flow freely that could be critiqued from a higher level of understanding. I found myself asking the questions: When individuals are vested in their way of knowing, how do I encourage them to move to a different level? For instance, how do I move Laura, who is listening to her own inner voice and is not interested in viewing the idea from a lens other than her own? How do I provide Chris with the support needed to pursue what she knows and feels is best at her level of understanding?

Through some more discussion as a group, a compromise was made. Laura agreed to try leveling three days a week with the option to reconvene to evaluate the situation. Ideally, these were the conversations and negotiations that encouraged change and growth. However, many times feelings can be hurt and misunderstandings can occur when people choose not to, or are unable to look through a different lens

other than their own. "All knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 137).

At a higher level of knowing, the conversation with my staff would look different. It would be an arena of discourse, exploration, talking and listening, questioning, speculation, sharing, and conflict. Discussions would feel like ideas emerging and growing, drawing out each participant's experience and analytical abilities.

This environment would be an example of the last level of understanding in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1997), called *constructed knowledge,* or the integration of the voices. This level does not come without struggle and challenge. Knowing and understanding that there are many dimensions impacting how people construct knowledge, and that we all are functioning within a variety of capacities to care, the challenge I face as a principal is immense. The process of understanding knowledge is one of receptive and productive communication and the construction of truth based on how we learn from life experiences and from what we gain from others.

What Matters Most in Educational Leadership

I've read many books on leadership from capacity leadership, to systems thinking, to change agent. The theories support the importance of strong administrative leadership, defined in a variety of ways. However, when it comes down to the base definition of leadership, I believe a person becomes a leader when there is a following. Without people to lead, a leader may arrive in meeting a goal, but alone. Effective leaders create an environment where other people can attain success.

Having taken an in-depth look at myself as a school leader and the issues that emerged throughout one year in the world of educational administration, I feel strongly that I ended the year with a "following" and professional goals were met successfully. I also felt that I helped create a trust-filled and safe environment where others could succeed, whether teaching, learning, or parenting. I believe I was a leader by my own definition.

Knowing full well that there are always areas of improvement needed, I reflected on my professional goals that were met. Some of the goals for my schools indeed went beyond meeting and exceeded my expectations, such as the extended day kindergarten we put into place. The vision to provide additional support to emerging language learners in kindergarten grew to an extension of the actual program and proved to be highly successful. The challenge I face now is how to sustain the progress made in my schools.

As I explored and processed my leadership through this autoethnography, I couldn't help but take a step back and wonder what seemed to matter the most in this important work that I do. Were there specific categories of leadership that were more dominant in my work? Cotton (2000) did not claim that one area of effective practice was more critical than the other, but the inclusion of any or all were proven through her research to make a difference in student achievement.

After comparing the percentage of time spent in certain categories during the time study log with my journal entries, I found some differences. Although the general administration and overhead was a high percentage of time spent during my two-week

study, my journal entries did not reflect the same high percentage. In the same way, the percentage of time documented in parent and community involvement was at only 5% in the time study log, but I found this to be a category of great significance in my journal entries. I noted the most significance in my coded journal entries as ones reflecting areas of human relationships, events, and reactions to these events. Also included in the journal were descriptions of basic and mundane tasks, but these were not comparable in number to the percentage reported in general administration and overhead in the time study log.

Realizing the importance of what was documented every 15 minutes and what was written in reflection, I discovered a few themes that were significant as to what seemed important in my leadership. As much as general administration was the highest percentage of time recorded in the time study log, I felt strongly that the highest percentage of my time should be balanced between strong administrative leadership and monitoring student progress. This does not in any way diminish the significance of the other categories, only stresses the importance of keeping focused on the many aspects of educational leadership.

I therefore asked the question, "What are some of the issues that seem to be at the core of my leadership?" Perhaps it wouldn't surprise the reader that two important attributes seem to be caring and relationships. A third issue that surfaced for me was the importance of sustainability. In the end it is important to question whether or not I have made a difference in the lives of the children, staff, parents, and other community members with whom I work.

The power of care and relationships.

If I had all the structures and systems in place to run a successful school, the impact of the issues that faced me during the year would have been meaningless without the element of care.

Nel Noddings (1992) describes one of the greatest tasks for schools is

to help students learn how to be recipients of care. Those who have not learned this by the time they have entered school are at great risk, and their risk is not just academic. Unless they can respond to caring attempts, they will not grow, and they will certainly not learn to care for others. (p.108)

Noddings challenges schools to think about what we want for our own children concerning their education. She maintains that this is what we should want for all children. Her point is that what we teach in schools today is not meeting the needs for most children and is not teaching children life skills. "The capacity to care may be dependent on adequate experience in being cared for" (p.22).

Many children in our society do not experience being cared for and are not witnessing the model to learn to care for others. Our schools can be a place of caring for all children that focus on the skills we need to care for others, animals, our environment, and ourselves. It is a great challenge to allow our perspective on how schools work *now*, to change to how we want our schools to *become,* in order to improve a child's learning experience.

Relations with intimate others are the beginning and one of the significant ends of moral life. In supportive environments where children learn how to respond to dependable caring, they can begin to develop the capacity to care. Whether their caring will be directed to the people around them, however, depends in part on the expectations of their teachers – the adults who guide them and serve as models for them. (Noddings, 1992, p. 52)

The caring element was profound in my experiences. I discovered great strengths in my abilities to reach out and listen to others and provide opportunities for the expression of grief and healing closure. However, I also experienced my weaknesses as an individual facing fear of such great responsibility as a leader. Many times I found myself wanting to disappear and depend on someone else for my own healing. I felt the strain and emotional stress from the dependency of others. Realizing this, I found myself releasing my energy and became vulnerable in ways that allowed me to gain strength from those around me. I let go of my ego in leading and became an individual, one with my staff and community around me. The bond that developed and trust that followed my release of vulnerability was rewarding.

The ultimate goal when all is said and done is how capable we are to contribute to and thrive in caring relationships. Do we live a life of cooperation, competence, intellectual curiosity, openness and willingness to share, and show an interest in existential questions? If not, how can we challenge ourselves to move beyond a knowing response that is limited to seeking our own inner voice? How well do we seek another's viewpoint, as well as construct a new response based on all levels of understanding? As a principal, how can I establish a school environment that provides for a higher level of knowledge based on caring for self, others and the world around us? These are questions I will continue to explore throughout my career.

Sustainability.

Fullan addresses sustainability in *Leadership and Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action* (2005). His general definition is "Sustainability is the capacity of a

system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep value of human purpose" (2005, p. ix). Fullan explored the approach of systems thinkers engaging in a powerful dynamic together, creating a force of sustainability beyond the present. Cyclical energizing is a term Fullan (2005) used to describe the ability to keep on going without burning out, not as a marathon, but systematically. "To do this, leaders need to seek sources and situations that push the limits of their energy and engagement, coupled with rituals or periodic breaks that are energy recovering" (Fullan, 2005, p. 35).

Setting in place meaningful systems that work and are successful and then using a "skillful and balanced management of energy is key to sustainability" (Fullan, 2005, p.37). The empowerment and development of the leadership skills in those around us can determine how strong the change and effort will live. My concerns were how to ensure a legacy would be secure when my leadership was gone. In the end, leadership changes and staff comes and goes, so sustainability is key to moving in a positive direction without recreating the wheel or exerting additional energy.

By building relationships based on mutual trust and providing opportunities for collaboration and shared decision-making, I increased ownership in the direction headed, thereby increasing the chances that the movement would continue regardless of my leadership.

> When the conditions of sustainability are put in place, the work is more efficient, effective, and rewarding. We need systems of people who are willing to go the extra mile, partly because the cause is noble, but also because they experience and know that success is possible. (Fullan, 2005, p. 104)

Although this study was about issues impacting an elementary principal, I believe the significance of this autoethnography transcends educational administration. For example, corporate leader Coughlin and her colleagues Wingard and Hollihan (2005) describe leadership as a synthesis and symphony of many voices. Coughlin shares that these voices together can create a positive community committed to achieving a powerful sense of belonging.

Coughlin et al.'s work focuses on creating a social awareness model in the work place that encourages both genders to collaborate in ways that develop personal fulfillment, greater business results, and more humane organizations. This is described as enlightened power. Coughlin's leadership model holds the vision where organizations involve the full participation of both men and women leaders towards transformative contribution. The results go beyond the organization to impacting the social and economic well being of communities and our world (2005).

People need the human connection, and through developing collaborative opportunities and involving leaders from across the system, new leadership capacities are more likely to spread to others. This creates a more meaningful and lasting environment where the benefit of the success of the system goes beyond them.

Saying Goodbye

Following Kara's celebration of life service, the year was winding down quickly and seemed extraordinarily peaceful for an end of a school year. It was late afternoon of an uneventful school day the end of May when the phone rang in my office. Answering, I was surprised to hear the voice of another school district's

director of personnel introducing herself. She shared that my name had come up as an

exceptional administrator and that they were interested in meeting with me to discuss a

job opportunity. This phone call would have been flattering under normal

circumstances; however the district that was calling was outstanding and drew master

teachers and very talented administrators. Plus, this was my home district, location of

my high school alma mater. It caught my attention.

> I left the phone on my ear long after the call was disconnected. I couldn't
> believe that I had just received a call from Hornsbrook School District. My
> feelings inside terrified me. Was I actually interested in pursuing this
> opportunity? I am intrigued, honored; yet all of a sudden felt quite small and
> insecure. Why me? I am not looking for another job. I love my two schools.
> We've been through such crises this year, how could I possibly leave? What
> about my family? We are just building a house, our dream house. I call Rick.
> He simply says, "I always knew you would be a match for Hornsbrook. You
> have to go talk with them. That's all there is to it!" (Journal, May 30th)

On the day of meeting to discuss the job opportunity, I kept telling myself this

was just a chance for networking with other colleagues in the state. I didn't call it an

interview, only a chance to have a conversation, since I hadn't even applied for a

position. Reflecting on these feelings, I understood my anxiety and need to feel in

control of the situation. I was in a great spot with nothing to lose. Or was this the case?

I had so very much to lose at Forest and Oak Hills.

Sitting around the conference table with the district's superintendent, assistant

superintendent, and director of personnel, I experienced the joy of sharing my story. I

shared my teaching experiences, my story of how I ended up at Forest and Oak Hills,

and my successes and challenges of the past year. Oddly, I chuckled when the

superintendent shared that this position would be dealing with challenging parents and

high stress situations. He looked at me with a puzzled look as I shared about the many

challenges and stresses at my schools. I doubted anything could compare. He smiled.

He closed our meeting asking if anyone from my current district knew I was there

talking with him. I answered no, explaining I was not looking for another position. I

loved my job. He let me know he would be calling my superintendent by tomorrow

afternoon if I were interested in this position, providing me time to inform her prior to

his call. This statement frightened me, yet I was pleased.

I walked away from the meeting confident and affirmed for who I had become

and what I had to offer in leadership. A door had opened for me to work at my current

schools and I had the courage to walk through. Now, if another door opened, I

wondered if I had the courage to follow.

The interview was on a Tuesday and I received a job offer on Thursday. It was

fast and furious and the door not only opened, it flew wide open. I accepted the offer

Friday, leaving the weekend for my family and me to get used to the idea before I

shared with my staff. School would be out for the summer in a week.

> I called a staff meeting for first thing this morning. The hum of cheerful voices
> came to a halt when I walked into the room. It was unusual to hold a spur of
> the moment staff meeting and I knew they were curious. I imagined some
> might have suspected why we were together, so I began by saying something
> funny, I think, I don't quite remember because it all became a blur. One of the
> teachers blurted out, "You're leaving aren't you?" I looked straight in her eyes
> and said yes. I rambled on about accepting a position that I hadn't sought, but
> no one was listening.
>> One by one the staff began to cry. Tears started to flow and adults
> grabbed for each other and me. The emotions were more than I ever could have
> imagined and swept me away. The impact of the short history we had shared
> together was summed up in the mood and bond expressed during this moment.
> The joys we shared in student successes, the laughter over silly mistakes and

triumphs, the fear experienced from the many acts of violence towards the school, the tears spent for the losses of 9/11 and Kara. I was humbled, simply humbled at this moment. (Journal, June 7th)

The next few days were a flurry of emotion, excitement, guilt, and pride. I couldn't quite explain my feelings as I said goodbye to one chapter in my life and welcomed another. Part of me was thrilled to move on to new adventures and part of me yearned to stay and grow and experience more journeys with my staff and friends. I questioned myself if they were ready for me to leave? We had been through so many trials together. Could they continue in a positive way? I answered, knowing that leadership had come and gone from this school for longer than I existed. The people remaining will uphold the legacies left, as they are the ones who are and create the spirit of the schools. The people I leave behind, students, staff and parents are the ones breathing life into the old, dilapidated buildings. For the schools' heart and soul are those inside.

> As I said my goodbyes, the students left, teachers packed up for the summer leaving me alone in the empty hallways. I walked the corridors and through each classroom visibly taking it all in. I could hear the voices in my head and smiled at the memories. Evelyn walked down the hall towards me.
> "Are you okay?" she asked. I assured her I was. "I'm really going to miss you Evelyn. You've been my life saver this past year. Thank you." She and I shed more tears, hugged, and walked back to the front of the school and outside. I stood on the sidewalk and looked toward the large classroom windows. "Please promise me one thing, Evelyn. If you do nothing else after all we've been through, please promise me you will make sure a whole row of red tulips are planted in honor of Kara."
> "Erin," she replied, "we will plant more than a whole row of tulips. I promise." With that, we hugged one last time and she and I parted to our cars to travel home. (Journal, June14th)

A Reflection of My Journey

The journey of self-exploration through autoethnography has been an exciting, yet tedious one. There were many times during the process I closed my eyes in exhaustion and felt as though my brain waves would never stop firing. I discovered weaknesses I tried to ignore and strengths I never knew I had.

Starting out as a new principal after teaching for many years, I held many ideals I felt strongly influenced me. I found myself critical of the leadership around me when I was still in the classroom; feeling the communication, organization and relational aspects from my principal could and should be stronger. Little did I know at that time, the many influences and impacts of the different issues surrounding the principalship, shaping the days and weeks of the administrative position.

My personal and professional identity has been shaken and molded and remolded through this year of reflection. I encountered many of the normal, expected issues of daily administrative life, plus additional issues that were beyond my control. Through the autoethnographical study conducted, my reflections have only just begun to allow me the freedom to search and grow in becoming a stronger, more effective leader in my school.

This was only the beginning of a personal journey I have embarked on and I am appreciative of the learning that has occurred. My hope is that I have gained a stronger understanding on how to better administer to those in my care and that my story can help enlighten administrators out in the field or those pursuing the profession. It was interesting to observe the integration of many leadership theories

within my work. The fact that there isn't just one way to lead is critical to remember.

As simply as Sergiovanni (1991) claims, the use of intellect and knowledge, combined

with action and led by the soul are vital to the success of a leader in schools, a leader

in life. It is with my *head,* my *hands,* and my *heart* that I will strive to continue to

lead.

A place where growth is exciting to observe and participate in, a place that

encourages change and fosters caring relationships, and a place where the leader is

within the circle of professionals making decisions, is a place where I want to be; a

follower of ideas, a collaborator, and a minister to staff. I have hope, and with this

hope I can and will make a difference in the field of education. I care, and I want

children to care. By modeling my ideals, I can make tiny, quiet steps in the direction

of moving the entire mountain. I won't see the mountain move, but I will be able to

look back and see my footprints.

You'll get mixed up, of course,
as you already know.
You'll get mixed up
with many strange birds as you go.
So be sure when you step.
Step with care and great tact
And remember that Life's
A Great Balancing Act.
Just never forget to be dexterous and deft.
And never mix up your right foot with your left.
(Seuss, 1990, p.40)

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